THE LONG PORTAGE

HAROLD BINDLOSS

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THE LONG PORTAGE

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ALTON OF SOMASCO
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THE GOLD TRAIL
MASTERS OF THE WHEATLANDS
SYDNEY CARTERET
A PRAIRIE COURTSHIP
VANE OF THE TIMBERLANDS
DELILAH OF THE SNOWS
WINSTON OF THE PRAIRIE
BY RIGHT OF PURCHASE
THE CATTLE BARON'S DAUGHTER
THRICE ARMED
FOR JACINTA

"ALL DAY LONG THEY PADDLED UP THE GLEAMING LAKE"—*Page 290*

THE LONG PORTAGE

BY

HAROLD BINDLOSS

AUTHOR OF

"VANE OF THE TIMBERLANDS," "SYDNEY CARTERET: RANCHER," "THURSTON OF ORCHARD VALLEY," "A PRAIRIE COURTSHIP," ETC.

WITH A FRONTISPIECE IN COLORS BY

ARTHUR HUTCHINS

TORONTO

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	The Gladwyne Expedition	1
II.	The Divide	12
III.	The Cache	23
IV.	A Painful Decision	35
V.	Millicent Gladwyne	47
VI.	Nasmyth Tells his Story	58
VII.	On the Moors	68
VIII.	Gladwyne Receives a Shock	81
IX.	Lisle Gathers Information	92
X.	Bella's Champion	102
XI.	Crestwick Gives Trouble	118
XII.	Mrs. Gladwyne's Appeal	129
XIII.	A Futile Protest	142
XIV.	Lisle Comes to the Rescue	153
XV.	Bella's Defeat	165
XVI.	Gladwyne Surrenders	177
XVII.	A Bad Fall	189
XVIII.	A Prudent Decision	200
XIX.	Gladwyne Gains a Point	211
XX.	Mrs. Gladwyne's Temptation	223
XXI.	The Last Afternoon	233
XXII.	Startling News	243
XXIII.	A Forced March	254

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
XXIV.	Millicent Summons Her Guide	265
XXV.	A Reliable Man	276
XXVI.	Lisle Turns Autocrat	287
XXVII.	An Unpleasant Surprise	298
XXVIII.	Clarence Reaches Camp	309
XXIX.	A Bold Scheme	321
XXX.	The End of the Pursuit	332
XXXI.	Lisle Goes to England	343

THE LONG PORTAGE

THE LONG PORTAGE

CHAPTER I

THE GLADWYNE EXPEDITION

VERNON LISLE was fishing with a determination that did not spring altogether from love of the sport. The water of the British Columbian river in which he stood knee-deep was icy cold; his rubber boots were badly ripped and leaky, and he was wet with the drizzle that drove down the lonely valley. It was difficult to reach the slack behind a boulder some distance outshore, and the arm he strained at every cast ached from hours of assiduous labor; but there was another ache in his left side which was the result of insufficient food, and though the fish were shy he persevered.

A few hundred yards away the stream came roaring down a long declivity in a mad white rapid and then shot across the glassy green surface of the pool below in a raised-up wedge of foam. Wet boulders and outcropping fangs of rock hemmed in the water, and among them lay stranded logs and stream-packed masses of whitened branches. Farther back, ragged cypresses and cedars, half obscured by the drifting haze of spray, climbed the sides of the gorge, and beyond rose the dim, rounded summits of treeless hills.

There were streaks of snow on some of them, for winter threatened to close in unusually early.

With a lowering sky overhead and the daylight beginning to fade, it was a desolate picture; one into which the lonely figure of the man in tattered deerskin jacket and shapeless hat somehow fitted. His attire matched the gray-white coloring of rock and boulder; his spare form and agile movements, together with the intentness of his bronzed face and the steadiness of his eyes, hinted at the quickness of observation, the stubborn endurance, and the tireless activity, by which alone life can be maintained in the savage North. He had the alertness of the wild creatures of the waste; and it was needed.

All round him stretched a forbidding wilderness, part of the great desolation which runs north from the warmer and more hospitable thick-forest belt of British Columbia. Indeed, this wilderness, broken by the more level spaces between the Rockies and Lake Winnipeg, runs right across Canada from Labrador to the Pacific on the northern edge of the heavy-timber line. It contains little human life — a few Hudson Bay fur-traders and the half-breed trappers who deal with them — and it is frozen for eight months in the year. There are only two practicable means of traversing it — with dog sledges on the snow, or by canoe on the lakes and rivers in the brief summer.

The water routes are difficult in British Columbia, but Lisle and his two companions had chosen to go by canoe, partly because the question of food is vitally important to men cut off from all source of supply except game, and even that is scarce in places. To transport upon one's back any weight of provisions

besides tents, blankets, and other necessaries, through a rugged country is an almost impossible task. The men, accordingly, after relaying part of their stores, had secured an Indian craft and had paddled and poled her laboriously across lakes and up rivers. Now when their provisions were running short, they were confronted with a difficult portage round a thundering rapid.

At length Lisle, securing another trout, waded ashore and glanced with a rueful smile at the dozen this one made. They scarcely averaged half a pound, and he had spent most of a day that could badly be spared in catching them. Plodding back along the shingle with his load, he reached a little level strip beneath a scarp of rock, where a fire blazed among the boulders. A tent stood beneath two or three small, wind-stunted spruces, and a ragged man in long river-boots lay resting on one elbow near the blaze, regardless of the drizzle. He was a few years over thirty, Lisle's age, and he differed from Lisle in that something in his appearance suggested that he was not at home in the wilds. As a matter of fact, Nasmyth was an adventurous English sportsman — which describes him fairly in person and character.

"Not many," he commented, glancing at the trout Lisle laid down. "They'll hardly carry us over to-morrow, and I only got a couple from the canoe with the troll. We've gained nothing by stopping here, and time's precious."

"A sure thing," Lisle agreed, beginning to clean the trout. "We'll tackle the portage as soon as it's light to-morrow. Where's Jake?"

"Gone off to look for a deer," was the answer.

"Said he wouldn't come back without one if he camped on the range all night."

Lisle made no comment, but went on dexterously with his work, while Nasmyth watched him with half-amused admiration.

"You're handy at that and at everything else you do," Nasmyth remarked at length. "In fact, you easily beat Jake, though he's a professional packer and, so to speak, to the manner born."

"So am I," said Lisle.

It was growing dark, but the coppery glow of the fire fell upon his face, emphasizing the strong coloring of his weather-darkened skin. On the whole, it was a prepossessing face, clearly cut — indeed, it was a trifle thin — with a hint of quiet determination in the clear gray eyes and firm mouth. He looked capable of resolute action and, when it was needed, of Spartan self-denial. There was no suggestion of anything sensual, or even of much regard for bodily comfort.

"If you don't mind my being a little personal, I'd better own that I suspected the fact you mention, and it puzzled me," Nasmyth replied. "You see, when I first met you at the Empress Hotel, in Victoria, you were dressed and talked like the usual prosperous business man. Trafford, who introduced us, said that you had a good deal of money in some of the Yukon mines."

"Trafford was quite right. The point is that I took a part in locating two of the claims. Before that I followed a good many rough occupations, mostly in the bush. My prosperity's recent."

Nasmyth still looked curious, and Lisle smiled.

"I can guess your thoughts — I don't speak altogether like a bushman? Well, my father was an Englishman, and my mother a lady of education from Montreal; that was why, at the cost of some self-denial on their part, I was sent East to school."

It was an incomplete explanation. He had inherited the Englishman's reticence, which forbade him to point out that his father sprang from an old family of standing and had, for some reason which his son had never learned, quarreled bitterly with his English relatives. Coming to Canada, he had married and taken up the bush life on a small and unremunerative ranch, where he had died and left his widow and his son badly provided for.

"Thank you," responded Nasmyth; and Lisle supposed it was in recognition of the fact that he would hardly have furnished even those few particulars to one whom he regarded as a stranger. "To reciprocate, a few words will make clear all there is to know about me. English public school, Oxford afterward — didn't take a degree. Spend most of my time in the country, though I make a few sporting trips abroad when I can afford it and have nothing better to do. That partly explains this journey. But I haven't tried to force your confidence, nor offered you mine, altogether casually."

"So I supposed," returned Lisle. "It strikes me that since we got near the Gladwyne expedition's line of march we have both felt that some explanation is needed. To go back a little, when I met you in Victoria and you offered to join me in the trip, I agreed partly because I wanted an intelligent companion, but I had another reason. At first I supposed you wished

to go because a journey through a rough and little-known country seems to appeal to one kind of Englishman, but I changed my mind when you showed your anxiety to get upon the Gladwyne party's trail."

"You were right. I knew the Gladwynes in England; the one who died was an old and valued friend of mine. I could give you the history of their march, though I hardly think that's needful. You seem remarkably well acquainted with it."

Lisle's face hardened. With the exception of one man, he knew more than anybody else about the fatal journey a party of four had made a year earlier through the region he and Nasmyth were approaching.

"I am," he said. "There's a cause for it; but I'll ask you to tell me what you know."

He threw more branches on the fire and a crackling blaze sprang aloft, forcing up the ragged spruce boughs out of the surrounding gloom.

"This is the survivor's narrative. I heard it from his own lips more than once," began Nasmyth. "I dare say most of it's a kind of story that's not unusual in the North."

"It's one that has been repeated with local variations over and over again. But go on."

"There were two Gladwynes — cousins. George, the elder of the two, was a man of means and position; Clarence, the younger, had practically nothing — two or three hundred pounds a year. They were both sportsmen — George was a bit of a naturalist — and they made the expedition with the idea of studying the scarcer game. Well, their provisions were insufficient; an Indian packer deserted them; they were de-

layed here and there; and when they reached the river that we are making for they were badly worn out and winter was closing in. Knowing it was dangerous to go any farther, they started down-stream to strike their outgoing trail, but not long afterward they wrecked their canoe in a rapid and lost everything except a few pounds of provisions. To make things worse, George had fallen from a slippery rock at the last portage and badly hurt his leg. After making a few leagues with difficulty, he found he could go no farther, and they held a council. They were already suffering from want of food, but their guide estimated that by a forced march overland they might reach a place where some skin-hunters were supposed to be camped. There was a Hudson Bay post farther away. On coming up they had cached some provisions in two places on opposite sides of the river — they kept crossing to pole through the easiest slack. George accordingly insisted that the others go on; each was to follow a different bank and the first to find the provisions was to try to communicate with the other and hurry back with food. If they were unable to locate the caches they were to leave the river and push on in search of help. They agreed; but deep snow had fallen and Clarence Gladwyne failed to find the cache. He reached the hunters' camp famishing, and they went back with him. He found his cousin dead."

"And the guide?"

"It's rather an ugly story. You must have heard it."

"I haven't heard the one Gladwyne told in England."

"The guide reached the Hudson Bay post — a

longer journey than the one Gladwyne made — in the last stage of exhaustion. He had taken very little food with him— Gladwyne knew exactly how much — and the Hudson Bay agent decided that it was impossible he could have covered the distance on the minute quantity. There was only one inference."

"That he had found the cache?" Lisle's face grew very stern.

Nasmyth nodded.

"In a way, there was some slight excuse for him. Think of it — a worn-out, famishing man, without blankets or means of making a fire, who had struggled over icy rocks and through leagues of snow, finding a few cans of provisions and a little moldy flour! Even when he had satisfied his hunger, he was, no doubt, unequal to making the return journey to rejoin a man who was probably already dead."

"If that man had found a scrap of food, he would have tried!"

Lisle's voice had a curious ring in it, and Nasmyth looked at him hard.

"You seem convinced."

"I am; I knew him well."

Nasmyth was startled and he showed it, but afterward he looked thoughtful.

"I believe I understand," he said.

For a minute or two there was silence which was broken only by the snapping of the branches on the fire and the hollow roar of the rapid. The latter had a curious, irritating effect on Nasmyth, who hitherto had scarcely noticed the insistent pulsatory clamor. At length Lisle spoke again, laying a strong restraint upon himself.

"Our mutual friend called me Lisle at the Empress Hotel. I don't think he mentioned my first name, Vernon; and as that was the name of Gladwyne's guide I kept it in the background. I was anxious to take you with me; I wanted an Englishman of some standing in the old country whose word would be believed. What was more, I wanted an honest man who would form an unbiased opinion. I didn't know then that you were a friend of Gladwyne's."

Nasmyth made a slight gesture which suggested the acknowledgment of a compliment.

"I'll try to be just — it's sometimes hard." His voice had a throb of pain in it as he went on: "I was the friend of George Gladwyne — the one who perished. I had a strong regard for him."

Something in his expression hinted that this regard had not been shared by the Gladwyne who survived.

"When my father first came out to British Columbia, new to the bush ways," Lisle resumed, "a neighbor, Vernon, was of great help to him — lent him teams, taught him how to chop, and what cattle to raise. He died before my father, and I was named for him; but he left a son, older than I, who grew up like him — I believe he was the finest chopper and trailer I have ever come across. He died, as you have heard, from exposure and exhaustion, a few days after he reached the Hudson Bay post — before he could clear himself."

Lisle broke off for a moment and seemed to have some difficulty in continuing.

"When my father died, Vernon took charge of the ranch, at my mother's request — I was rather young and she meant to launch me in some profession. Ver-

non had no ambition — he loved the bush — and he tried to give me enough to finish my education while he ran both ranches with a hired man. I think my mother never suspected that he handed her over more than she was entitled to, but I found it out and I've been glad ever since that I firmly prevented his continuing the sacrifice. For all that, I owe him in many ways more than I could ever have repaid." He clenched one hand tight as he concluded: "I can at least clear his memory."

Nasmyth nodded in sympathy.

"You called me an honest man; you have my word — I'll see the right done."

Quietly as it was spoken, Lisle recognized that it was no light thing his companion promised him. In the Dominion, caste stands by caste, and Lisle, having seen and studied other Englishmen of his friend's description, knew that the feeling was stronger in the older country. To expose a man of one's own circle to the contempt and condemnation of outsiders is, in any walk of life, a strangely repugnant thing.

"Well," he said, "to-morrow we'll pull out and portage across the divide to strike the Gladwynes' trail. And now I'll fry the trout and we'll have supper."

They let the subject drop by tacit agreement during the meal, and soon after it was over a shout from the crest of the ridge above, followed by a smashing of underbrush, announced that their packer was making for the camp. Lisle answered, and a cry came down:

"Got a deer, and there are duck on the lake ahead! We'll try for some as we go up!"

Nasmyth's smile betokened deep satisfaction.

"That's a weight off my mind," he declared. "I'll smoke one pipe, and then I think I'll go to sleep. We'll make a start with the first loads as soon as it's light enough."

CHAPTER II

THE DIVIDE

DAWN was late the next morning; the light crept slowly through bitter rain, and when Lisle and his companions had breakfasted sumptuously for the first time during several days it was with reluctance that they broke camp. Indeed, Nasmyth would have suggested remaining under shelter only that he had come to accept Lisle's decision as final and the latter was eager to push on. The blacktail deer would not last them long; the trout were getting shyer every day with the increasing cold; they were a long distance from the nearest settlement; while winter was rapidly coming on.

Nasmyth shouldered his load with the others, and they set out across a strip of gravel strewn with boulders. Here and there networks of stranded branches had to be floundered through, and the ragged ends rasped their dilapidated boots and bruised their legs. Then, where the bluff rose almost precipitously from the water, they crept along slippery ledges, or waded through the shallower pools, with the white rapid roaring down a few yards outshore of them. There were places where a slip would have meant destruction, but that was nothing unusual and time was too precious to spend in an attempt to climb the ridge which hemmed them in.

The pack-straps hurt Nasmyth's shoulders — one of them had been rubbed raw by previous loads and it smarted painfully until he grew warm with exertion. He was soon wet through; in places the spray drove into his face so that he could hardly see; but he held on with dogged determination, trying to keep up with the others. With the exception of a few hunting trips, his life had been smooth, and now, dressed mostly in rags and aching in every limb, he smiled grimly as he remembered how he had hitherto taken his pleasure. When he had shot partridges, he had, as a rule, been driven to such stubble or turnip fields as lay at any distance from his residence, and he had usually been provided with a pony when he ascended the high moors in search of grouse. Money smoothed out many small difficulties in the older land, but it was powerless in the wilds of the new one, where one must depend on such things as native courage, brute strength, and the capacity for dogged endurance, which are common to all ranks of men. It was fortunate for Nasmyth that he possessed them, but that, as he was discovering, is not quite enough. They are great gifts in the raw, but, like most others, they need exercise and assiduous cultivation for their full development.

On reaching the head of the rapid, they went back for another load, and afterward Jake got into the canoe, while Lisle fixed the end of the tracking-line about his shoulders. Aided by the line, the packer swung the canoe across madly whirling eddies and in and out among foam-lapped rocks, and now and then drove her, half hidden by the leaping froth, up some tumultuous rush. At times Lisle, wading waist-deep and dragged almost off his feet, barely held her sta-

tionary — Nasmyth could see his chest heave and his face grow darkly flushed — but in another instant they were going on again. That a craft could be propelled up any part of the rapid would, Nasmyth thought, have appeared absolutely incredible to any one who had not seen it done.

At last, however, the task became too hard for them and after dragging her out they carried her, upside down, in turn. It was difficult for them to see where they were going, and the craft, made from a hollowed log, was by no means so well fitted for the work as the bark or canvas canoe of the more eastern wilds. She was comparatively heavy, and their heads and shoulders were inside of her. Once or twice the portager fell; and the fall is an awkward one, as it is impossible to break it with one's hands, which are occupied in holding the canoe. Still, they made progress, and, launching again above the rapid, they reached a lake at noon, by hard paddling. Here they landed, and Nasmyth dropped down upon a boulder to look about him.

It was a cheerless prospect he saw through the haze of rain. Back into the distance ran a stretch of slate-gray water, flecked and seamed by the white tops of little splashing waves, for a nipping wind blew down the lake. On either side rose low hills, dotted here and there with somber and curiously rigid trees. They were not large, and though from a distance they looked much the same, Nasmyth recognized some as spruce and supposed the other ragged spires to be cedars. In one spot there were some that resembled English larch, and these were almost bare.

Then his companions began to discuss the best

means of further progress. With a fresh breeze ahead, Jake advocated poling through the shallows near the beach; and Lisle, with a courtesy which Nasmyth had already noticed, turned toward him when he answered, as if his opinion might be valuable.

"The trouble is that the beach sweeps back off the straight. We'd drive her right up the middle to headwater with the paddle before we'd make two-thirds of the way poling alongshore."

"It would be a good deal harder work, wouldn't it?" Nasmyth ventured, and laughed when he saw Lisle's faint amusement. "I suppose that doesn't count. It's not worth mentioning," he added. "Since you're anxious to get on, what's the use of stopping for dinner? After the breakfast I had, I can hold out some time."

"I want to get through as quickly as I can; that's why I'm not going to rush you unless it's necessary," Lisle answered. "Try to get hold of the fact that a man needs food regularly to keep him in efficient going order."

"Indisputable," Nasmyth agreed. "But he can do without it and work for a while. We've proved it."

"Not without paying," Lisle pointed out. "You can draw upon your reserves, but it takes time and rest to make them good. We may need all ours badly before we're through."

There was a grim hint in his last words which Nasmyth found convincing, and when he had rested he helped to prepare the meal. It was a simple one — cold doughy cakes baked in a frying-pan, extraordinarily tough and stringy venison, with a pint-can

each of strong green tea. Their sugar had long ago melted and the condensed milk was exhausted.

Afterward, they shoved the canoe out and paddled doggedly into the driving rain and the strong head-wind. The spray from the splashing bows blew into their faces, and the broken water checked them badly. Nasmyth's hands began to blister. To make it worse, there was a raw wound on one of them, the result of a similar day's toil; and his knees chafed sore against the branches in the craft's bottom. There was, however, no respite — the moment they slackened their exertions they would drift to lee — and he held on, keeping awkward stroke with Jake, while Lisle swung the balancing paddle astern.

They kept it up for several hours, and then, toward evening, the rain ceased and the clouds rolled aside. A wonderful yellow light shone behind the bordering hills, and the twisted, wind-battered cedars on their crests stood out against it in hard, fretted tracery. The wind dropped; the short, white waves smoothed down; the water, heaving gently, gleamed with a coppery glare, and the paddle blades seemed to splash up liquid fire. Then the shores closed in ahead, and, landing on a shingle beach, they made camp in the mouth of a gap among the hills. Supper was prepared and eaten, and afterward Jake took up his rifle.

"I saw some ducks in the next bay," he explained.

He strolled out of camp, and Nasmyth smiled at Lisle.

"Except when he advised you to pole, that's about all he has said to-day."

This was correct. The packer was a taciturn in-

habitant of the wilds who seldom indulged in an unnecessary remark. There was, however, no moroseness about him; the man was good-humored in his quiet way, and his usual ruminative calm was no deterrent from apparently tireless action. For the most part, he lived alone in the impressive stillness of the bush, where he had a few acres of partly cleared land which failed to provide him with a living. For that reason, he periodically left his tiny log house and packed for some survey expedition, or went down to work for a few months at a sawmill. Capable of most determined labor, wonderfully proficient with his hands, he asked no more from life than a little plain food and indifferent shelter. No luxury that civilization could offer would have tempted him to desert the wilds.

Lisle filled his pipe with leisurely content. He shared Jake's love for the wilderness, and he found it strangely pleasant to rest in camp after a day's persistent toil. Besides, he usually enjoyed his evening chat with Nasmyth, for, widely different as their training and mode of life had been, they had much in common. Then, too, there was something in the prospect spread out before them that impelled tranquillity. The clump of wet cedars among which they had camped distilled a clean, aromatic smell; and there was a freshness in the cool evening air that reinvigorated their tired bodies. Above the low hilltops the sky glimmered with saffron and transcendental green, and half the lake shone in ethereal splendor; the other half was dim and bordered with the sharply-cut shadows of the trees. Except for the lap of water upon the pebbles and the wild cry of a loon that rang like a

peal of unearthly laughter out of a darkening bay, there was nothing to break the deep stillness of the waste.

Lisle pointed to the gap in the hills, which was filling with thin white mist.

"That's the last big portage the Gladwynes made," he remarked. "They came in by a creek to the west, and they were badly played out when they struck this divide; the struggle to get through broke them up." He paused before he added: "What kind of men were they?"

"George wasn't effusive; he was the kind of man you like better the longer you know him. If I were told that he ever did a mean thing, I wouldn't believe it. His last action — sending the others on — was characteristic."

"They didn't want to go," Lisle interposed quietly.

His companion nodded.

"I believe that's true. I like to think so."

There was something curious in his tone, which Lisle noticed.

"From the beginning," Nasmyth went on, "George behaved very generously to Clarence."

"It was Clarence that I meant to ask about more particularly."

Nasmyth looked thoughtful, and when he answered, it struck Lisle that he was making an effort to give an unbiased opinion.

"Clarence," he said, "is more likable when you first meet him than George used to be; a handsome man who knows how to say the right thing. Makes friends readily, but somehow he never keeps the best of them. He's one of the people who seem able to get whatever

they want without having to struggle for it and who rarely land in any difficulty."

Again a grudging note became apparent, as though the speaker were trying to subdue faint suspicion or disapproval, and Lisle changed the subject.

"Had George Gladwyne any immediate relatives?"

"One sister, as like him as it's possible for a woman to be. He wasn't greatly given to society; I don't think he'd ever have married. His death was a crushing blow to the girl — they were wonderfully attached to each other — but I've never seen a finer display of courage than hers when Clarence cabled the news."

He broke off, as if he felt that he had been talking with too much freedom, and just then the report of a rifle came ringing across the water.

"That's a duck's head shot off. Jake doesn't miss," he said.

Lisle nodded. He could take a hint; and he had no doubt that Nasmyth was right regarding the shot, though it is not easy to decapitate a swimming duck with a rifle. He began to talk about the portage; and soon after Jake returned with a single duck they went to sleep.

It was clear and bright the next morning and they spent the day carrying their loads a few miles up the hollow which pierced the height of the divide. Part of it was a morass, fissured with little creeks running down from the hills whose tops rose at no great elevation above the opening. This was bad to traverse, but it was worse when they came to a muskeg where dwarf forest had once covered what was now a swamp. Most of the trees had fallen as the soil, from some change in the lake's level, had grown too

wet. They had partly rotted in the slough, and willows had afterward grown up among them.

Now and then the men laid down their loads and hewed a few of the still standing trunks, letting them fall to serve as rude bridges where the morass was almost impassable, but the real struggle began when they went back for the canoe. At first they managed to carry her on their shoulders, wading in the bog, but afterward she must be dragged through or over innumerable tangles of small fallen trunks and networks of rotten branches that had to be laboriously smashed. It was heroic labor — sometimes they spent an hour making sixty yards — and Lisle's face grew anxious as well as determined. Game had been very scarce; the deer would not last them long; and disastrous results might follow a continuance of their present slow progress. When, utterly worn out, they made camp on slightly firmer ground toward four o'clock in the afternoon, Lisle strode off heavily toward the bordering hills, while Jake pushed on to prospect ahead. Nasmyth, who was quite unable to accompany either, prepared the supper and awaited their reports with some anxiety.

Lisle came back first and shook his head when Nasmyth asked if he had found a better route on higher ground.

"Not a slope we could haul along," he reported. "That way's impracticable."

It was nearly dark when Jake came in.

"It's not too bad ahead," he informed them.

They were not greatly reassured, because Jake's idea of what was really bad was alarming. Nasmyth glanced at his companion with a smile.

"Is it any better than this?" he asked.

"A little," answered Jake. "An old trail runs in."

"Gladwyne's trail?" exclaimed Nasmyth. "The one we're looking for?"

"Why, yes," drawled Jake, as if it were scarcely worth mentioning. "I guess it is."

Nasmyth turned to Lisle.

"I was lucky when I lighted on you as a companion for this trip. You have been right in your predictions all along, and now you're only out in striking the trail a day before you expected."

"I know the bush," returned Lisle. "It's been pretty easy so far — but, for several reasons, I wish the next week or two were over."

Nasmyth looked troubled. One could have imagined that misgivings which did not concern his personal safety were creeping into his mind.

"So do I," he confessed, and turning toward the fire he busied himself with Jake's supper.

There was no change in the work the next morning, but in the afternoon it became evident that another party had made that portage ahead of them. The soil was a little drier and where the small trees grew more thickly they could see that a passage had been laboriously cleared. In the swampy hollows, which still occurred, trunks had here and there been flung into the ooze. This saved them some trouble and they made better progress, but both Lisle and Nasmyth became silent and grave as the signs of their predecessors' march grew plainer. By nightfall they had reached the second camping-place, which told an eloquent story of struggle with fatigue and exhaustion. Lisle, stop-

ping in the gathering dusk, glanced around the old camp site.

"A good place to pitch the tent, but I think I'd rather move on a little," he said.

Nasmyth made a sign of comprehension.

"Yes," he agreed. "I couldn't sleep soundly here. Everything about us is too plain a reminder; I've no doubt you feel it as I do. A firm and trusted friend lay, famishing, beside that fire, in what extremity of weakness and suffering I dare not let myself think. It's possible he cut those branches yonder."

Lisle's face expressed emotion sternly held in check.

"That was Vernon's work — no Englishman new to the country could have slashed them off so cleanly. But look at this small spruce stump. He was the better chopper, but it's significant that he used three or four strokes where I would have taken one."

Even the laconic Jake appeared relieved when they forced their way a little farther through the tangled undergrowth, until finding a clear space they set up the tent.

CHAPTER III

THE CACHE

THEY spent the greater part of a week on the portage, crossing here and there a little lake; and then came out one evening on a river that flowed, green and tranquil, beneath a ridge of hills. Here they camped; and on rising with a shiver in the raw and nipping dawn the next morning, Nasmyth found Lisle busy at the fire. Jake was cutting wood some distance off, for the thud of his ax rang sharply through the stillness.

"I was awake — thinking — a good deal last night; in fact, I've been restless ever since we struck the Gladwynes' trail," Nasmyth began. "Now, I understand that an uninterrupted journey of about sixteen days would take us well on our way toward civilization. You say you apprehend no difficulty after that?"

"No." Lisle waited, watching his companion in an intent fashion.

Nasmyth hesitated.

"Then, considering everything, mightn't it be better to waste no time, and push straight on?"

"And leave the work that brought me here — I believe that brought us both here — undone?"

"You'll forgive me if I don't express myself very fortunately. What I feel is this — Gladwyne's story is a tragic one, but it's twelve months old. In a way, it's forgotten; the wounds it made have healed."

"Is such a man as the one you have described forgotten in a year?" Lisle asked with a hardening expression.

Nasmyth, being a man of simple and, for the most part, wholesome ideas, was in a quandary. His feelings were generous, but he shrank from putting them into words. Moreover he was just and was not wholly convinced that the course he wished to recommend was right.

"Well," he contended, "there are faithful hearts that never quite forget — with them the scar remains; but it's fortunate that the first keen pain does not last. Is it decent — I almost think that's the right word — to reopen the wound?"

He paused and spread out one hand as if in expostulation.

"Your late comrade has gone beyond your help; you told me he had left no relatives; and you have only yourself to consider. Can you do any good by bringing this sorrowful tale of disaster up again?"

"Are you pleading for your English friends, anxious to save them pain at my expense? Can't you understand my longing to clear my dead partner's name?"

A trace of color crept into Nasmyth's face.

"I suppose I deserve that, though it wasn't quite the only thing I meant. I've an idea that you are somehow going to lay up trouble for yourself by persevering in this search."

"I don't want to be offensive; but can't you see that by urging me to let the thing drop you are casting grave doubts upon the honor of a man of your own caste and kind, one with whom you are closely ac-

quainted? Are you afraid to investigate, to look for proofs of Clarence Gladwyne's story?"

Nasmyth looked him steadily in the eyes.

"For the sake of one or two others, I think I am. Your belief in the guide, Vernon, has had its effect on me."

"Then," said Lisle, "I have no fear of putting my belief to the test; I came up here for that purpose, and I mean to call upon you as my witness. As you said of George Gladwyne, the man I owe so much to never did a shabby thing. That he should have deserted a starving comrade is clean impossible!"

"I suppose there's no help for it," responded Nasmyth, with a gesture of acquiescence. "We have said enough. Since you insist, I'll stand by my promise."

The thudding of the ax ceased, and they heard Jake returning with the wood. Lisle set out the simple breakfast, and when they had eaten they launched the canoe and floated swiftly down the smooth green river all that day. They had accomplished the worst half of the journey; henceforward their way lay downstream, and with moderate good fortune they need have no apprehension about safely reaching the settlements, but they were both silent and ill at ease. Lisle was consumed with fierce impatience; and Nasmyth shrank from what might shortly be revealed to him. Scarcely a word was spoken when they lay in camp that night.

The next day they came to the head of a long and furiously-running rapid. Rocks encumbered its channel; the stream boiled fiercely over sunken ledges, dropping several feet here and there in angry falls; and in one place, where the banks narrowed in, a white

stretch of foaming waves ran straight down the middle. Here they unloaded and spent the day laboriously relaying their stores and camp-gear over the boulders and ragged ledges between a wall of rock and the water. It was a remarkably difficult traverse. In places they had to hoist the leader up to some slippery shelf he could not reach unassisted and to which he dragged his companions up in turn; in others deep pools barred their way, and in skirting them they were forced to cling to any indifferent handhold on the rock's fissured side. As they toiled on, badly hampered by their loads, the same thought was in the minds of two of the men — a wonder as to how Gladwyne's exhausted party had crossed that portage, unless the water had been lower. It was not difficult to understand how the famishing leader had fallen and lamed himself.

When at last, toward the end of the afternoon, the stores had been deposited on the banks of the pool below, Lisle sat down and filled his pipe.

"It would take us most of two days to portage the canoe, and we might damage her badly in doing so," he said. "The head of the rapid's impossible, but with luck we might run her down the rest in about ten minutes. The thing seems worth trying, though I wouldn't have risked it with the stores on board."

"Suppose you swamped or upset her?" Nasmyth suggested.

"It's less likely, since she'd go light, with only two of us paddling."

Nasmyth considered. The sight of the rapid was not encouraging, but he shrank from the intense effort that would be needed to transport the craft by the way

they had come. Eventually it was decided to leave Jake below, ready to swim out with the tracking-line and seize the canoe if any mishap befell, and Lisle and Nasmyth went back to the head of the rapid. They dragged the canoe round the worst rush with infinite difficulty; and then Nasmyth set his lips and braced himself for the mad descent when his companion thrust her off.

A few strokes of the paddle drove them out into the stream, and then their task consisted in holding her straight and swinging her clear of the rocks that showed up through the leaping foam, which was difficult enough. Seen from the water, the prospect was almost appalling, though it was blurred and momentarily changing. Nasmyth's eyes could hardly grasp salient details — he had only a confused impression of flying spray, rushing green water that piled itself here and there in frothy ridges, flitting rocks, and trees that came furiously speeding up toward him. He had an idea that Lisle once or twice shouted sharp instructions and that he clumsily obeyed, but he could not have told exactly what he did. He only knew that now and then he paddled desperately, but more often he knelt still, gazing fascinated at the mad turmoil in front of him.

At last there was an urgent cry from Lisle and he backed his paddle. The canoe swerved, a foaming wave broke into her, and in another moment Nasmyth was in the water. He was dragged down by the swirling stream, and when he rose he dimly saw the canoe a few yards in front of him. He failed to reach her — she was traveling faster than he was — and, though he could swim well, he grew horribly

afraid. It struck him that there was a strong probability of his being driven against a boulder with force enough to break his bones or of being drawn down and battered against the stony bottom. Still, he struck out for a line of leaping froth between him and the bank and was nearing it when Lisle grasped his shoulder and thrust him straight down-stream. Scarcely able to see amid the turmoil, confused and bewildered, he nevertheless realized that it was not desirable to attempt a landing where he had intended. Yielding to the guiding impulse, he floundered down-stream, until Lisle again seized him and drove him shoreward, and a few moments later he stood up, breathless, in a few feet of slacker water. He waded to the bank, and then turned to Lisle, who was close behind.

"Thanks," he gasped. "I owe you something for that."

"Pshaw!" disclaimed the other. "I only pulled you back. You'd have got badly hammered if you'd tried to cross that ledge. I'd noticed the inshore swirl close below it when we were packing along the bank, and remembered that we could land in it."

"But you had hold of the canoe. I saw you close beside her."

"I only wanted her to take me past the ledge," Lisle explained. "I'd no notion of going right through with her. Now we'll make for camp."

On arriving there as darkness closed down, they found that Jake had recovered the craft. The paddles had gone, but he could make another pair in an hour or two. They had a few dry things to put on, and as they lay beside the fire after supper they

were sensible that the slight constraint both had felt for the last two days had vanished. Neither would have alluded to the feeling which had replaced it, nor, indeed, could have clearly expressed his thoughts, but mutual liking, respect and confidence had suddenly changed to something stronger. During the few minutes they spent in the water a bond, indefinite, indescribable, but not to be broken, had been forged between the two.

The next morning it was clear and cold, and they made good progress until they landed late in the afternoon. Then, after scrambling some distance over loose gravel, Lisle and Nasmyth stopped beside a slight hollow in a wall of rock. A few large stones had been rudely placed on one another to form a shelter; there were still some small spruce branches, which had evidently been used for a roof, scattered about; and the remains of a torn and moldering blanket lay near by. In another place was a holed frying-pan and a battered kettle.

Nasmyth gravely took off his shapeless hat, and stood glancing about him with a fixed expression.

"This," he said quietly, "is where my friend died — as you have heard, they afterward took his body out. There are few men who could compare with that one; I can't forget him."

There was nothing to be done, and little that could be said; and they turned away from the scene of the tragedy, where a man, who to the last had thought first of his companions, had met his lonely end. Launching the canoe, they sped on down-river, making a few easier portages, and four days later they landed on the bank of a turbulent reach shut in

by steep, stony slopes. There was a little brushwood here and there, but not a tree of any kind.

"It was on this beach that Gladwyne made one cache," said Lisle. "If there had been a cypress or a cedar near, he'd have blazed a mark on it. As it is, we'd better look for a heap of stones."

They searched for some time without finding anything, for straight beach and straight river presented no prominent feature which any one making a cache would fix upon as guide. Lisle directed Nasmyth's attention to this.

"There was deep snow when Vernon came down the gorge, on this side," he pointed out. "It doesn't follow that he was with the others when they buried the stores — he might have been carrying up a load — and it's possible they couldn't give him a very exact description. If I'm right in this, he'd have a long stretch of beach to search, and a man's senses aren't as keen as usual when he's badly played out."

Nasmyth made no comment, but his expression suggested that he would not be disappointed if they failed to strike the cache. Shortly afterward, however, Jake called out, and on joining him they saw a cross scratched on a slab of slightly projecting rock. Even with that to guide them, it was some time before they came upon a few stones roughly piled together and almost hidden in a bank of shingle.

"First of all, I want you to notice that this gravel has slipped down from the bluff after the cache was made," Lisle said to Nasmyth. "With snow on the ground and the slab yonder covered, it would be almost impossible to locate it." He turned to Jake. "How

long would you say it was since the rain or frost brought that small stuff down?"

Jake glanced at the young brushwood growing higher up the slope. It was shorter than that surrounding it, and evidently covered the spot which the mass of débris had laid bare in its descent.

"Part of one summer and all the next," he answered decidedly.

"Tell us how you figured it out."

Jake climbed the bank and returned with two or three young branches which he handed to Lisle.

"The thing's plain enough to you." He turned toward Nasmyth. "No growth except in the summer — they'd had a few warm months to start them, but they don't fork until the second year. See these shoots?"

"As winter was beginning when the Gladwyne party came down, that small landslide must have taken place some time before then," declared Lisle.

They set to work and carefully moved aside the stones. First they uncovered three cans of preserved meat, and then a small flour bag which had rotted and now disclosed a hard and moldy mass inside. There was also another bag which had evidently contained sugar; and a few other things. All examined them in silence, and then sat down grave in face.

"It's unfortunate that nobody could positively state whether this cache has been opened or not since it was made, but there are a few points to guide us," said Lisle. "Do you know what kind of food civilized men who've been compelled to work to exhaustion on insufficient rations, helped out by a little fish or game, generally long for most?"

"No," answered Nasmyth, with a feeble attempt at levity. "I've now and then remembered with regret the kind of dinner I used to get in England."

"You have scarcely felt the pinch," Lisle informed him. "The two things are farinaceous stuff and sugar. No doubt, it will occur to you that Vernon might have taken a can or two of meat; but that's not likely."

"If you're right about the longing for flour and sweet-stuff, it's a strong point," Nasmyth declared. "Where did you learn the fact?"

Lisle looked at Jake, and the packer smiled in a significant manner.

"He's right," he vouched. "We know."

"Then," continued Lisle, indicating the sugar bag, which had been wrapped in a waterproof sheet, "can you imagine a starving man, in desperate haste, making up this package as it was when we found it?"

"No," admitted Nasmyth; "it's most improbable."

Somewhat to his astonishment, the usually taciturn Jake broke in.

"You're wasting time! Vernon never struck this cache — he told the folks at the post so. Worked with him once trail-cutting — what that man said goes!"

"You never told me you knew Vernon!" exclaimed Lisle.

"Quite likely," Jake drawled. "It didn't seem any use till now."

For the first time since they landed, Nasmyth laughed — he felt that something was needed to relieve the tension.

"If people never talked unless they had something

useful to say, there would be a marvelous change," he declared.

Lisle disregarded this, but he was a little less grave when he resumed:

"There's another point to bear in mind. Two of Gladwyne's party left him; and of those two which would be the more likely to succumb to extreme exertion, exposure, and insufficient food?"

"Against the answer you expect, there's the fact that Vernon made the longer journey," Nasmyth objected.

"It doesn't count for much. Was Clarence Gladwyne accustomed to roughing it and going without his dinner? Would you expect him to survive where you would perish, even if you had a little more to bear?"

"No," confessed Nasmyth; "he's rather a self-indulgent person."

"Then, for example, could you march through a rough, snow-covered country on as little food as I could?"

"No, again," answered Nasmyth. "You would probably hold out two or three days longer than I could."

"Vernon was a stronger and tougher man than I am," Lisle went on. "Now, without finding definite proof, which I hardly expected, there is, I think, strong presumptive evidence that Vernon's story is correct."

"Yes," agreed Nasmyth, and added gravely: "Will you ever find the proof?"

"I think there's a way — it may be difficult; but I'm going right through with this."

"What's your next move?"

"I've willingly laid my partner's story open to the only tests we can impose. Now I'm going to do the same with Clarence Gladwyne's."

Nothing more was said, and turning away from the cache, they went back to the canoe.

CHAPTER IV

A PAINFUL DECISION

TWO days passed uneventfully, though Nasmyth was conscious of a growing uneasiness during them; and then one evening they landed to search another beach. They had less difficulty here, for small cedars and birches crept down to the water-side and Jake found an ax-blaze on one. After that, it was easy to locate the cache, and there were signs that it had been either very roughly made, or afterward opened and reclosed in careless haste. Lisle had no hesitation in deciding upon the latter, and Jake was emphatic in his brief assurance on the point.

On removing the covering stones, they found very little beneath them, but every object was taken out and Lisle, measuring quantities and guessing weights, carefully enumerated each in his notebook. Neither he nor Nasmyth said anything of import then; both felt that the subject was too grave to be lightly discussed; and walking back silently along the shingle, they pitched the tent and prepared supper. After the meal, Jake, prompted by an innate tact, sauntered away down the beach, and the other two, lounging beside the fire, took out their pipes. A full moon hung above the lonely gorge, which was filled with the roar of the river, and the shadows of the cedars lay black upon the stones.

Some minutes passed before a word was spoken; and then Nasmyth looked up.

"Well?" he said briefly.

Lisle moved a little, so that he could see his companion's face.

"In the first place," he explained, "Clarence Gladwyne came down this bank. One could locate the cache by the blazed tree, even with snow upon the ground — and it has been opened. Apart from the signs of this, no party of three men would have thought it worth while to make a cache of the few things we found."

"Mightn't it have been opened by some Indian?"

"It's most unlikely, because he would have cleaned it out. A white prospector would certainly have taken the tobacco."

Nasmyth knit his brows. He was deeply troubled, because there were respects in which the matter would hardly bear discussion, though he recognized that it must now be thrashed out.

"Well," he admitted reluctantly, "what we have discovered has its significance; but it isn't conclusive."

His companion took out from a pocket the palm and wrist portion of a fur glove. It was badly rotted, and the rest had either fallen away or been gnawed by some animal, but a button with a stamp on it remained.

"Jake found that and gave it to me," he said. "There's enough left to show that it had finger-stalls, and there are none on the mittens we use in cold weather. The thing's English, and with a little rubbing I expect you'll find the maker's name on that but-

ton. When the party went up it was warm weather, but we know there was sharp frost when Gladwyne came back. A buttoned glove doesn't drop off one's hand, and even if it had done so Gladwyne would have noticed and picked it up. It seems to me he took it off to open one of the provision bags and couldn't find it afterward because he'd trodden it into the snow."

Nasmyth could doubt no longer, and his face grew red.

"The hound!" he broke out. "He had a hand frost-bitten — one finger is different from the others yet."

Lisle said nothing; he could understand and sympathize with what was going on in his companion's mind and the latter was filled with bitterness and humiliation. A man of his own kind and station in life, one with whom he fished and shot, had broken faith with his starving comrade and with incredible cowardice had left him to perish. Even this was not the worst; though Nasmyth had always taken the personal courage of his friends for granted. He was not a clever man and he had his faults, but he shaped his life in accordance with a few simple but inflexible rules. It was difficult for him to understand how one could yield to a fit of craven fear; but there was a fact which made Gladwyne's transgression still blacker.

"This thing hits hard," he said at length. "The man should have gone back, if he had known it meant certain death."

Lisle filled his pipe and smoked in silence for several minutes during which the eery cry of a loon rang

about the camp. It roused Nasmyth to an outbreak of anger.

"I hate that unearthly noise!" he exclaimed vehemently. "The thing seems to be gloating; it's indecent! When I think of that call it will bring back the long portage and this ghostly river! I wish I'd never made the journey, or that I could blot the whole thing out!"

"It can't be done," Lisle replied. "It's too late. You have learned the truth of what has been done here — but the results will work themselves out. Neither you nor I can stop them; they have to be faced."

"The pity of it is that the innocent must suffer; they've borne enough already."

"There's a point I don't quite understand," declared Lisle. "Whatever the Hudson Bay agent thought, he'd have kept it to himself if he'd been allowed — I've met him. It was Gladwyne who laid the whole blame on Vernon; he forced the agent to bear him out. Why should he have taken so much trouble? His own tale would have cleared him."

Nasmyth looked irresolute; and then he answered reluctantly:

"There's a fact I haven't told you yet — Clarence came into the family property on George's death; a fine old place, a fairly large estate. The sister doesn't count, though she got her brother's personal property — the land goes down in the male line."

Lisle dropped his pipe.

"Now I understand! Gladwyne profits, my dead partner bore the shame. But do you believe the man meant to let his cousin die?"

"No," Nasmyth answered sharply, "that's unthinkable! But I blame him almost as much as if he had done so. Besides his duty to George, he had a duty to himself and to the family — the honorable men and women who had kept the name clean before him. Knowing he would inherit on George's death, there was only one way open — he should have gone back, at any cost. Instead, to clear himself of the faintest trace of ugly suspicion, he lays the blame upon an innocent man."

Lisle did not reply to this. He felt that had the grim choice been imposed upon his companion, the man would have taken the course he had indicated.

"You said that George Gladwyne was a naturalist," he remarked. "Was he a methodical man?"

"Eminently so," replied Nasmyth, wondering where the question led. He had already been astonished at Lisle's close reasoning and the correctness of his deductions.

"Then he would have made notes on his journey and no doubt have kept some kind of diary. Did the rescue party recover it?"

"They did. It was given to George's sister."

"Damaged by snow or water, badly tattered?"

"It was," assented Nasmyth. "I've had the book in my hands. I suppose it's natural that you should guess its condition, but I don't see what it points to."

Lisle smiled grimly.

"One wouldn't be astonished to find some leaves missing from a tattered book."

"You're right again." Nasmyth started. "Several had gone."

"I think I can tell which part of the journey they

related to. A methodical man would make a note of the stores cached, and the lists would be conclusive evidence if anybody afterward opened the caches and enumerated their contents, as we have done. If everything put into the one on the bank Vernon followed remained there, it would prove that he couldn't have found it. On the other hand, if the one on Gladwyne's side of the river —"

"Of course!" Nasmyth broke in. "You needn't labor the point; it's plain enough." He stopped for a few moments before he went on again. "I'm convinced; but without that list of Gladwyne's you still haven't proof enough to place your account of the affair beyond dispute. What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to England — it's my father's country, and I meant to visit it some day. Whether I shall find out anything more there or not I don't know."

"Then you must stay with me. That's a point I insist upon. But I must make my situation clear — though I've been drawn into this matter against my will, you have my promise, and if ever the time for action comes, I'll stand by you. But I'll take no part in trapping Clarence Gladwyne into any admission, nor will I countenance any charge against him unless some chance supplies you with indisputable evidence."

"Thanks," said Lisle; "I'm agreeable. You stand neutral until I call on you."

"There are two more questions, and then we'll let the subject drop. Why didn't you make this search earlier? Why didn't Gladwyne rearrange the caches afterward? He went back, you know."

"They're easily answered. It was some time before I heard of Vernon's death and met the Hudson Bay

man in Victoria — I'd been away in the North. Gladwyne had the rescue party with him when he went back; he couldn't replace the provisions in the cache on this side without their knowing it, and I don't suppose he could have crossed the river to the other cache. Now we'll talk of something else."

They started again the next morning, and instead of leaving the river for the Hudson Bay post, which stood farther back into the wilderness, they held on down-stream, though they afterward regretted this when their provisions once more grew scanty. There was now sharp frost at nights; fangs of ice stretched out behind the boulders and crackling sheets of it gathered in the slacker eddies along the bank. What mattered more was that the portages were frequent, and carrying the canoe over rock coated with frozen spray became dangerous as well as difficult, and Nasmyth working on short rations began to feel the strain. It was only since he had entered that inhospitable region that he had ever been compelled to go without his dinner; and now breakfast and supper were sternly curtailed. When they were stopped for two days by a blinding snowstorm he grew anxious, and his uneasiness had increased when some time afterward they made their evening meal of a single flapjack each. He could readily have eaten a dozen of the thin, flat cakes. The duck they had shot every now and then since crossing the divide had gone; they had not seen a trout since the cold set in; and there did not appear to be any salmon in the river.

After breakfast the next morning, Lisle concluded that it would be wise to risk a day looking for a deer, so he invited Nasmyth to take his rifle and the two

set out. It cost them some trouble to climb the low bluff above the river through a horrible tangle of fallen trunks. The trees were getting larger and the branches of those the wind had brought down lay spread about them or were resting on the standing growth in networks which Nasmyth would have thought it impossible to traverse had he been alone. Lisle scrambled through, however, and he had no choice except to follow. Where the timber was thinner, the slope was covered with sharp-edged stones which further damaged his already dilapidated boots; and when at last they came out upon a comparatively bare, rocky tableland, a bitter wind met them in the teeth. It drove a little fine snow before it, but Lisle plodded steadily on, explaining that any deer which might be in the neighborhood would have gone down into the sheltered valleys. He had no doubt they would find one of the valleys, for they were generally numerous.

It was an hour before they reached one, and Nasmyth was conscious of an unpleasant pain in his side and a headache which he supposed resulted from want of food. For all that, he scrambled after his companion down an almost impossible descent, where trees of increasing size grew up among outcropping rock and banks of stones. When he reached the bottom he found himself in a deep rift filled with densely-matted underbrush, through which a swift stream flowed. Its banks promised a slightly easier road, though now and then they had to wade through the water, which was icy cold. Noon came and they had seen no sign of life, except two or three willow-grouse which they failed to dislodge from cover; but Lisle

held on, his course running roughly in a line with the river.

It was toward three o'clock, and a little snow was sifting down between the somber branches overhead, when Lisle, stopping, raised a warning hand and pointed to an opening in the trees. The light was dim among the rows of trunks, and for a few seconds Nasmyth gazed down the long colonnade, seeing nothing. Then Lisle pointed again, impatiently, and he made out something between a gray trunk and a thicket. Sportsman as he was, he had not the bushman's eye, and he would never have supposed that formless object to be a deer. It moved, however; a prong of horn appeared; and waiting for nothing further he pitched up his rifle.

It was a long shot, standing; he guessed the range in a deceptive light; but he found himself strangely steady as he squeezed the trigger. He was desperately hungry and weak from want of food; the deer must not escape. Yet he was in no rash haste; for two or three seconds the tiny foresight trembled slightly upon the mark, while the pressure on the trigger increased. Then there was a flash; he heard no report but the smoke blew into his eyes. Almost simultaneously, a train of red sparks leaped out from somewhere close at his side and there was a sharp snapping in the bush ahead.

"You got your shot in!" cried Lisle. "I think I missed him on the jump. Come on; we must pick up the trail!"

It was easy to find; the deer had been too badly hit to bound across each obstacle as cleanly as usual, and broken twigs and scattering withered leaves

showed which way it had gone. Besides, there were red splashes here and there. It was, however, a difficult matter to follow the trail. Fallen trees and dense thickets barred the way, and they had to cross the creek every now and then. Nasmyth rapidly got breathless and before long he was badly distressed, but he held on behind his companion. Once or twice he was held fast for a moment or two, and breaking free, found he had badly ripped his garments on the ragged branches. Still, it was unthinkable that they should let the deer escape.

As he struggled forward, he remembered that the days were rapidly shortening, and he shrank from the prospect of retracing his way to camp in the dark. It occurred to him that it was a compliment and a mark of very fine courtesy that Lisle had left the first shot to him. In return for this, he must endeavor to be present to assist when he was wanted.

The deer was still invisible, but it was not very far ahead, for at times the snapping of a stick or a rustle of disturbed underbrush came sharply out of the woods. The light was getting dimmer and the snow was falling more thickly.

At last the hunted creature left the valley and after a desperate scramble the men reached the summit of the ridge above. Here the tableland between them and the river was covered with straggling bush, and though the undergrowth was thin they could see nothing but the long rows of shadowy trunks. Lisle, however, picked up the trail, and they followed it as rapidly as possible until, when Nasmyth was lagging some distance behind, there was a shout in front of him and his companion's rifle flashed. Making a last

effort, he broke into a run and presently came to the brink of a steep descent covered with thick brush and scattered trees, with a wide reach of palely gleaming water at the foot of it. It was the kind of place one would have preferred to climb down cautiously, but there was a sharp snapping and crackling below and Nasmyth knew that a hard-pressed deer will frequently take to the water. If it crossed the river, it would escape; and that could not be contemplated.

Holding his rifle up, he plunged madly down the descent, smashing through matted bushes, stumbling over slippery stones. Once or twice he collided with a slender tree and struck his leg against some ridge of rock; but he held on, gasping, and the water rapidly grew nearer. He had almost reached it when a dim shape broke out from a thicket at the bottom of the slope. There were still some cartridges in his rifle cylinder, but he was slipping and sliding down an almost precipitous declivity at such a rate that it was impossible to stop and shoot. Indeed, in another moment he fell violently into a brake and had some difficulty in smashing through it, but when he struggled free he saw shingle and boulders in front of him and Lisle bounding across them a few yards behind the deer. He reached the stones, wondering why Lisle did not fire; and then he saw man and deer plunge into the water together.

A few seconds later he was waist-deep in the swift icy current, savagely endeavoring to drag the animal toward the bank, while Lisle stood near him, breathing hard, with a red hunting-knife in his hand.

"Steady!" gasped Lisle. "You can't do it that

way! Help me throw the beast on his side. Now heave!"

They got the deer out, and Nasmyth sat down limply. All the power seemed to have gone out of him; he did not want to move, though he was filled with exultation, for they now had food. It was a minute or two before he noticed that Lisle had left him; and then he saw him coming back with his rifle.

"I dropped the thing," Lisle explained. "Couldn't snap a fresh shell in; guess I bent the slide. I took the knife to finish it."

"In another moment or two you'd have been too late."

Lisle laughed.

"I don't know. It wouldn't have been decided until we'd reached the other side."

"You would have swum across?" Nasmyth asked in astonishment.

"Sure," said Lisle simply. "Anyway, I'd have tried."

Nasmyth glanced at the river. It was broad, icy cold, and running fast, and he could hardly imagine a worn-out and half-fed man safely swimming it. Lisle, however, called upon him to assist in an unpleasant operation which, when Nasmyth had killed a deer at home, had been judiciously left to the keepers or gillies. After that, he was directed to light a fire on a neighboring point, from which it could be seen some way up the river, and by and by Jake arrived in the canoe. Then they made camp, and after a feast on flesh so tough that only hungry men could have eaten more than a few morsels of it they went to sleep.

CHAPTER V

MILLICENT GLADWYNE

IN a few more days they left the river, abandoning the canoe and tent and a portion of their gear. Ascending to higher levels, they crossed a rugged waste, which, fortunately for them, was thinly timbered; but there was keen frost, and snow in places, and Nasmyth suffered a good deal during this portion of the journey. At last, however, they descended to a sheltered valley in which the firs grew tall, and Jake agreed with Lisle that it would form the best road to the settlements.

Nasmyth was longing for civilization when he lay awake late one night, wrapped in a single blanket, beside the sinking fire. Dark columnar trunks rose about him, touched with the uncertain red radiance now and then cast upon them when little puffs of bitter wind stirred the blaze, and he could see the filmy wreaths of smoke eddy among the branches. He was cold and overtired; the day's march had been a long one; his shoulders ached cruelly after carrying a heavy load, and every joint was sore. Besides, his bed was unpleasantly hard, and he envied his companions, who had long ago sunk into heavy slumber. For the last hour he had been thinking over the discoveries he had made on the journey, which he devoutly wished he had never undertaken; the thought of them had troubled him on other bitter nights.

Lisle was not the man to let the matter drop; he was much more likely to follow it up with dogged persistence to the end; and Nasmyth, who was to some extent pledged to assist him, saw trouble ahead.

In spite of this, he was beginning to get drowsy when a faint and yet strangely melodious chiming broke through the whispering of the firs. It seemed to come from above him, falling through the air, and he roused himself to listen, wondering if he were quite awake. The musical clash he had first heard had ceased, but for a while he thought he could distinguish the tolling of a single bell; then in varying notes the peal broke out again.

There was something ethereal in the clear tones. The last time he had heard anything like them he was sitting one Sunday morning on a shady lawn while the call of the bells came softly up to him across the English woods. He glanced at his comrades, but they showed no sign of hearing, and raising himself on one elbow he lay and listened, until the music, growing fainter and fainter, died away. Then, puzzled and half convinced that his imagination had played him some fantastic trick, he went to sleep.

He mentioned the occurrence diffidently at breakfast the next morning, expecting incredulous laughter; but Lisle, without making a comment, glanced at Jake questioningly.

"No," responded Jake. "Nothing to bring them up so far."

"You couldn't have been mistaken?" Lisle asked Nasmyth.

"I thought I must be; but the more I listened, the clearer it got."

"Go and see," Lisle said, addressing Jake, and when they had finished breakfast the packer strode away.

"We'll wait a bit," advised Lisle. "I'm a little worried about provisions again. It's still a long march to the nearest wagon trail."

Nasmyth failed to understand how the delay would improve their position, but believing that his companion was somewhat dubious about his tale he restrained his curiosity. In half an hour Jake came back and nodded to Lisle.

"Quite a bunch of them," he reported. "I struck the fellow's trail."

"What was it I heard?" Nasmyth asked.

"Cow-bells," Lisle explained, laughing. "In this country, they generally put them on any cattle that run loose in the timber. Some adventurous rancher has located up here, though I hadn't expected to find one so far north. Anyway, it's a relief; he'll no doubt be able to let us have something to eat."

They reached the man's log house an hour later, and spent the day with him, enjoying a much needed rest. The next morning he supplied them with provisions and told them how to find a trail down to a wagon road; and, setting out, they safely reached a settlement in regular communication with the cities.

It was the settlement Lisle had expected to come to, and he found a bundle of correspondence awaiting him there. Before he opened it, however, he and Nasmyth supplied themselves with such clothing as they could obtain at the local store, and then demanded a bath at the little wooden hotel. They had some trouble in obtaining it, but Nasmyth was firm, and eventually he sat down to supper, clad in a blue shirt

with scarlet trimmings, extremely tight-fitting clothes and daintily-pointed shoes.

"I think I'd have done better if I'd stuck to my rags, or else bought a pair of what that fellow called river-Jacks' boots," he commented ruefully.

Lisle was similarly attired, but he was too busy with his meal to sympathize with him, and some time after it was over Nasmyth, strolling into the private room which they had obtained as a signal concession, found him writing at a littered table. Sitting down, he watched him for a while with some slight wonder. For a number of weeks, he had seen his companion handling heavy loads, cooking, and hauling canoes round rapids with the skill of a professional packer. It was hard to disassociate him from the ranges and the bush; but now, with the pile of letters before him, he had suddenly become a business man. Nasmyth saw him answer a couple in a swift, decided manner which showed that he was at home in his present occupation. It was one of the quick character-changes which, while common in the West, are apt to bewilder the more stereotyped Englishman.

"Are you coming to England with me?" Nasmyth asked at length.

"No; I'm sorry I can't," answered Lisle, pausing, pen in hand. "This Gladwyne matter will probably take time and I have none to spare now. There have been some unexpected developments in my affairs. I don't know when I can get away."

Nasmyth was conscious of some relief. His companion would have to defer the prosecution of plans that threatened to cause trouble in England, which

was something to be thankful for, though he had a strong sympathy for the man.

"Has it ever struck you that you might have less difficulty if you could be content with proving half of what you claim?" he asked. "It's the more important part — I mean that your late comrade failed to find the cache."

"Half a truth is not much use — Gladwyne realized that. To declare you haven't done the wrong is a good deal less effective than pointing to the guilty man."

"I suppose that's correct," Nasmyth agreed. "But, after all, unless you can get hold of a list of the provisions cached — and it has most likely been destroyed — there's only one way of substantiating your views."

"Exactly. Gladwyne's confession will place the matter beyond all doubt."

"Do you think you will ever get it?"

Lisle's expression hardened.

"Well," he said, "I'm going to try."

Nasmyth abandoned all attempt to daunt or dissuade him.

"Anyway," he resumed, "when you come over you must stay with me. I'm sorry we'll have to part company to-morrow. I start east by the first train."

He strolled out into the moonlight and the keen frosty air. The little wooden town was soon left behind, and sauntering down the rough wagon road beneath towering firs, he saw the great hill summits glitter white against the sky. It was a wonderful country; the grandest he had ever traversed; but it

demanded a good deal from the man who ventured into its wilds, and he was not sorry that he was turning his back on it.

Then, as he thought of the land he was bound for and recalled the tragic story of Gladwyne's journey, he once more grew troubled. He realized the immutable sequence of cause and effect — each action had its result which must be faced however much one repented and regretted it. The deed, once done, could not be altered and, what was worse, its consequences reached out to others. Then he wondered whether Clarence had ever repented, and admitted, with a recurrence of his indignation against the man, that it was far from probable. Clarence was one who took life lightly, and although his means had been small until he came into his cousin's possessions, he had somehow succeeded in getting what is often considered the best out of it. Self-denial in any shape was unknown to him.

The next morning Nasmyth took the train for Montreal, and about a fortnight later alighted at a little station in the north of England as the early dusk was closing in. It was a quiet evening and the soft moistness of his native air struck him as something pleasantly familiar after the keener, drier atmosphere of the Dominion. He was glad to be back again, but when he looked around, the trap waiting in the wet road outside the railings was not his own. Neither did it belong to Clarence, whom he had partly expected; but on the whole Nasmyth was glad of that. He had not looked forward to the first meeting with Clarence with any pleasure.

In another moment, a girl came along the platform

through the groups of local passengers, who respectfully made way for her. She was tall, and her long outer garment failed to conceal her grace of movement and fine poise, though in the fading light her face was almost invisible beneath a large hat. The sight of her sent a thrill of satisfaction through the man; it was seldom that Millicent Gladwyne's appearance was unwelcome to her friends. She approached him with outstretched hand.

"I drove over for you. Clarence couldn't come; he was suddenly called up to town," she began. "It would have been rather lonely for you to spend the first evening by yourself at the Lodge. You will come to us?"

"Thoughtful as ever," smiled Nasmyth, with a little bow which was respectful as well as friendly. "I needn't ask how you are; the way you walked along the platform was a testimony to our Border air."

She laughed, softly and musically.

"It is more needful to inquire how you have stood your adventures?"

"I believe I'm thinner; but that isn't astonishing, everything considered. I suppose Clarence is getting on pretty satisfactorily?"

"Clarence? Oh, yes!" There was a hint of uncertainty in her voice which Nasmyth noticed. "He has been in town a good deal of late. But come along; the horse — he's a new one — is rather restive. They'll send on your things."

"The remnant of my outfit's contained in one small bag," laughed Nasmyth; "the rest's scattered about the hillsides of British Columbia. I was a picturesque scarecrow when I reached the settlements."

They moved away along the platform, and on reaching the trap he got up beside her and handed her the reins.

"I want to look about, if you don't mind," he explained.

"I really think the prospect's worth it," she replied. "Besides, Riever's fresh and needs humoring."

She shook the whip, and as they clattered away down the steep, twisting road, Nasmyth glanced with satisfaction to left and right. He had seen wilder and grander lands, but none of them appealed to him like this high, English waste. On one hand dim black hills rose out of fleecy mist; on the other a leafless birch wood, close by, stood out in curiously fragile and delicate tracery against a paling saffron glow, though overhead the sky was barred with motionless gray cloud. A sharp smell of peat-smoke followed them as they clattered past a low white cottage with a yellow glow in one window; and then the earthy scent of rotting leaves replaced it as they plunged into the gloom of an oak wood beneath the birches. A stream splashing down a hollow made faint music in the midst of it. When they had emerged from the shadow and climbed a steep rise, wide moors stretched away in front, rising and falling in long undulations, streaked with belts of mist. The crying of restless plovers came out of the gathering dimness.

"All this is remarkably nice; though I don't think I should have appreciated it quite so much if I'd been alone," Nasmyth said at length.

Millicent laughed lightly. She had known him since her childhood and was quite aware that he had not intended to pay her a labored compliment; they were too

good friends for that. Once, indeed, he had desired a closer bond, but he had quietly acquiesced when with gentle firmness she had made it clear that she was not for him. Submission had not been easy, but he had long admitted her right to more than he could offer. In this, however, he was to some extent mistaken, because the gifts he could bring — a staunch honesty, faithfulness, and a genial nature — are not to be despised.

"Well," she replied, "I love these moors and dales, as of course you know, and I've become more of a stay-at-home than ever during the past year." There was a slight regretfulness in her voice which had its meaning for him. "I'm never satisfied with the drawings," she went on, "though I've made so many of them."

Nasmyth made a sign of comprehension. She had undertaken to finish and illustrate her brother's roughed-out work, a book on the fauna of the Border, and she had brought to it a fine artistic skill and patience, as well as a love of the wild creatures of the waste. It was, perhaps, a curious occupation for a young woman, but she had devoted herself to it with characteristic thoroughness.

"He wanted it to be as complete and accurate as possible," she added simply.

Her companion felt compassionate. In some respects, it was almost a pity that Millicent could not forget.

"You got my letter — the one in which I said I meant to pick up and follow out his trail?" he asked.

"Yes. I knew it would be difficult. Indeed, I was

anxious about you; the wilderness has claimed so much from me. But did you —"

"I succeeded," Nasmyth answered quietly.

The nod she gave him was expressive. It meant that she had expected him to succeed; he was a man who did what he said.

"I think George should never have made that journey," she resumed. "Fond of the open as he was, he hadn't the physical stamina. He never spared himself; he was apt to overestimate his powers."

It was spoken with a grave regretfulness that troubled Nasmyth and yet stirred him to strong appreciation of her character. With all her love for her brother, she could face the truth.

"I've learned that he bore everything with the fortitude one would expect from him — doing his share always with the rest," Nasmyth said. "We got through a little earlier, and had better weather; but I saw enough to convince me that the difficulties George had to contend with would have killed any ordinary man."

"They did not kill Clarence."

Nasmyth once more burned with anger against the transgressor.

"No," he replied in a strained tone; "Clarence escaped."

She flashed a sharp glance at him, and he felt glad that it was too dark for her to see his face.

"You must tell me the whole story to-night," she requested.

Her companion made no answer. With the reserve that must be maintained on several points, the story would be difficult to relate; and it could not fail to be

painful to her. The horror she would feel if she ever learned that her brother might have been saved had his cousin shown more resolution was a thing he dare not contemplate, and he wondered if the shock the knowledge must bring could be spared her. This depended upon Lisle, whom he had promised to assist. Nasmyth could foresee nothing but trouble, and he was silent for a while as they drove on across the lonely moor.

CHAPTER VI

NASMYTH TELLS HIS STORY

DINNER was over, and Millicent's elderly companion had discreetly left them alone, when the girl led Nasmyth into her drawing-room. It was brightly lighted and was tastefully decorated in delicate colors, and a wood fire was burning on the hearth; but, for the first time that he could remember, Nasmyth felt ill at ease in it. He was fresh from the snow-covered rocks and shadowy woods and the refinement and artistic luxury of his surroundings rather jarred on him. The story he had to relate dealt with elemental things — hunger, toil, and death — it would sound harsher and more ugly amid the evidences of civilization.

"You have a good deal to tell me," Millicent suggested at length.

He stood still a moment, looking at her. She had already seated herself, and the sweeping lines of her pose suggested vigor and energy held in quiet control. Her face was warm in coloring, bearing signs of exposure to wind and sun, but it was chastely molded in a fine oval with the features firmly lined. Her hair was dark, though there were bronzy gleams in it, and her eyes, which were deeply brown, had a sparkle in them. As a whole, her appearance indicated a sanguine, optimistic temperament, but there was also an

indefinite something which spoke of due balance and repose. Nasmyth was more convinced than ever that he had not met any other woman fit to compare with her. Her age, as he knew, having given her many birthday presents, was twenty-four.

"Yes," he said, in answer to her remark, "but it's curious that I can't fix my mind upon the subject here. The night's mild; shall we go out on to the veranda?"

"Wait until I get a wrap. I understand."

"You always do that," Nasmyth declared.

She joined him outside in another minute and seated herself in the chair he drew out. The house was small and irregularly built, and a glass roof supported on light pillars stretched along part of the front. A half-moon hung above a ridge of dark fir wood, a tarn gleamed below, and here and there down a shadowy hollow there was a sparkle of running water. On the other side of the dale the moors stretched away, waste and empty, toward the half-seen hills. The loneliness of the prospect reminded Nasmyth of Canada, and the resemblance grew more marked when the crying of plover rose from the dim heath — it brought back the call of the loon. Still, he did not wonder why Millicent, an orphan with ample means, lived alone except for her elderly companion on the desolate Border.

"You don't mind, I know," he said as he lighted a cigar.

"I can make that concession willingly," she answered with a smile. "I suppose I'm old-fashioned, because I go no farther."

"Keep so," advised Nasmyth. "Of course, that's unnecessary; but I never could make out why women

should want to smoke. From my point of view, it isn't becoming."

He was putting off a task from which he shrank, and she indulged him.

"One retains one's prejudices in a place like this," she said. "I felt sadly left behind when I was last in London; and the few visits I made in the home counties a little while ago astonished me. Nobody seemed to stay at home; the motors were continually whirling them up to town and back; the guests kept coming and going. There was so much restlessness and bustle that I was glad to be home again."

"It has struck me," returned Nasmyth with an air of sage reflection, "that we who live quietly in the country are the pick of the lot. Sounds egotistical, doesn't it? But if we don't do much good — and I'm afraid I don't, anyway — neither do we do any harm."

"I'm not sure that that's a great deal to be proud of."

"I didn't include you," Nasmyth assured her. "There have been wholesome changes in the village since you grew up and made your influence felt. And that leads to a question: How does Clarence get on with his tenants and the rank and file? George understood them, but they're difficult folks to handle."

"He's away a good deal — I'm afraid there has been some friction now and then." The girl's manner suddenly changed. "But that's beside the point. Aren't you wasting time?"

"I am almost afraid to begin. You will find the story trying."

She turned toward him, and the moonlight showed her face was reassuringly quiet.

"I expect that; but your fears are groundless. You needn't hesitate on my account."

Nasmyth knew that she was right; Millicent was not one to flinch from pain. With an effort, he began his story at the portage over the divide, and, possessed by vivid memories, he made her see the desolate region they had laboriously traversed. Because her imagination was powerful, she could picture the brother she had loved toiling with desperate purpose and failing strength through muskeg and morass. Then, when she quietly insisted, he described Gladwyne's last camp. She saw that, too: the hollow beneath the dark rock, with the straggling cedars on the ridge above. Next he outlined the journey down the first few rapids, saying little about the caches, and at last, with considerable relief, he came to a stop. Millicent sat silent for several minutes, during which he did not look at her.

"Thank you," she said at length. "I have tried often to imagine it, and failed; but it is quite clear now. Clarence would never give me more than the barest details — I think he hated to speak of it."

"In a way, he was wise," replied Nasmyth. He understood the man's reluctance. "Now don't you think it would be better if you tried to drive the thing out of your mind? It can't be altered — there's a danger in dwelling too much upon one's grief."

She looked up at him, though her eyes were dim with tears.

"It can't be driven out. There were only the two of us; we had so much in common — there was such trust between us."

Nasmyth nodded in comprehension and sympathy.

"Now that I've told you," he said quietly, as he rose, "I think I'll go. I am sure you'd rather be alone."

"No," she answered, motioning to him to sit down. "Please stay." She seemed to rouse herself with an effort. "Of course, there was only one thing George could do when he was lamed — send them on. But Clarence, who was with him, never made his fortitude and cheerfulness so clear as you have done. You even mentioned the exact words he said now and then — how did you hear of them?"

"From my companion, a young Canadian. He had the whole thing by heart; got it from the Hudson Bay agent. George's guide told the agent."

"Did your companion also teach you how to tell the story?"

Nasmyth smiled. He saw that she was desirous of changing the subject and he was glad of it.

"Anyway, he made me see it at the time; pointed out the full significance of things — a broken branch, a scratch on a rock. A rather striking man in several ways. But you shall see him; he's coming over to stay with me by and by." He paused a moment. "I understand that Clarence has been having some trouble."

"It hardly amounts to that. But things are not the same as they were"— in spite of her courage she faltered —"when George held control. The tenants don't take to Clarence; I think he was not well advised in increasing rents here and there. Indeed, that was a little puzzling, because he was once so liberal."

"In small matters; it's his own money now." Nasmyth could not repress this show of bitterness.

"Whose money was it in his extravagant days?"

"That's a question I've thought over and failed to find an answer to. I've no doubt most of what he gets is now being spent in town, though in my opinion as much as possible ought to go back to the locality in which it was produced. Why don't you impress that on him?"

Millicent, as he knew, could judiciously offer sound advice where it was needed. She was young, but, having been left an orphan early, she had long enjoyed her brother's close companionship and confidence, and the man's wide knowledge and thoughtfulness had had its effect in molding her character. Still, in this case, she did not respond.

"It would be better for his tenants and the neighborhood generally if Clarence married; he can afford it now," Nasmyth went on.

Again the girl was silent, and he wondered whether he had thoughtlessly made a serious blunder. It had been supposed among their friends that she would marry Clarence some day, though, so far as it was known, there was no definite understanding between them, and for a while the man's attitude had strengthened the idea. Indeed, when he had succeeded to George's possessions, every one had expected an announcement, which had not been made. What Millicent thought, or what she had looked for all along, did not appear.

"I think you are right in one thing," she said, very calmly, at length. "If he would stay here, as George did and his neighbors do, it would be better for everybody, including himself."

Nasmyth made a sign of agreement. Their inti-

mate friends remained for the greater portion of the year on their estates, understanding the needs of their tenants and dependents and enjoying their good opinion, which was naturally increased by the fact that their expenses were chiefly incurred in the neighborhood. There were others who, as the small farmer recognized, returned as little as possible to the soil, squandering revenues raised by the stubborn labor of others in doubtful pleasures elsewhere and, when they brought their friends home, on luxuries despatched from town. These things made for bitterness.

An unfortunate persistence in his hobby drove Nasmyth into a second blunder.

"We're in accord on that point," he assured her. "It's a pity the land passed out of your hands. However, as there's no male succession, it might, after all, come back to you."

She bore it very calmly.

"You wouldn't have me speculate on such a thing?"

Then as if to find a safer topic she went on with a thrill of anger in her tone:

"I'll tell you of an incident I witnessed two or three days ago, which annoyed me seriously. I'd just met old Bell — you know how lame he is — driving some sheep along the road. It has been a wet, cold year; Bell lost his hay, the oats are dreadfully poor, and his buildings are in very bad repair."

"They were a disgrace to any estate when I last saw them," Nasmyth broke in. "Besides, the sour land near the river should have been tile-drained long ago."

"So Bell has urged; but he can't get Marple to spend a penny — I'm glad that man's new to this part

of the country and doesn't belong to us. Well, just after I met Bell, Marple's big motor came along. He had Batley with him and the Crestwicks, who were down before. I think you met them? "

"I did," assented Nasmyth. "In Canada they'd call them a mighty tough crowd; they're about the limit here."

"I turned round after the car had passed," Millicent went on. "Marple was driving, as fast as usual, and he made no attempt to pull up. Bell, who didn't hear, tried to jump and fell into the ditch; most of the sheep were scattered across the moor, but two or three got right in front of the car and at the last moment Marple had to stop. One of the women laughed, she had a very shrill voice and she explained that the old man looked so funny in the ditch; Marple shouted to Bell — something about the damage to his tires — and I could see the others smiling at what he said. That was worse than the words he used. Then they went on, leaving the old man to gather up his sheep; he hadn't a dog with him. That kind of thing leaves its mark! "

"Distinctly so," Nasmyth agreed. "Still, Marple and his lot are exceptions. Wasn't Clarence rather thick with them? "

"Yes," she answered. "I've been rather disturbed about him."

Nasmyth did not know what this meant. He thought she would hardly have made such an admission had she contemplated marrying the man; and, if not, it was somewhat difficult to see why he should cause her serious concern. He knew, however, that Millicent could not look on unmoved when her friends

left the right path; he could think of two or three whom she had helped and gently checked from further straying. This reflection was a relief to him, because he was determined that she should not marry Clarence if he could prevent it. If necessary, he would tell her the part the man had played in Canada, though he shrank from doing so.

"Marple and his acquaintances are not the people one would have expected Clarence to associate with," he continued. "Still, in my opinion, he's doing worse in making a friend of that fellow Batley. I could never understand the connection — the man strikes me as an adventurer. Has he spent much time here since I've been away?"

"A good deal, off and on. But it's getting chilly and I half expect a reproving lecture from Miss Hume when I go in. First, though, tell me a little more about the young Canadian you had with you."

"I don't know much. I met him by accident — he has an interest in some mines, I believe, but he struck me as a remarkably fine type. Clever at woodcraft, as handy with the ax and paddle as our professional guide, but when he talked about other things he seemed to know a good deal more than I do." He smiled. "After all, that's not surprising. But what I liked most was the earnestness of the fellow; he had a downright way of grappling with things, or explaining them to you. Sensible, but direct, not subtle."

"I've met men of that description, and I'm rather prejudiced in their favor," declared Millicent, smiling. "But what was he like in person — slightly rugged?"

"No; that's where you and others sometimes go wrong. There's nothing of the barbarian about these

bushmen. Physically, they're as fine a type as we are — I might go farther — straight in the limb, clean-lined every way, square in the shoulder. They'd make an impression at any London gathering."

"So long as they didn't speak?"

"It wouldn't matter. Allowing for a few colloquialisms, they're worth listening to; which is more than I'd care to say for a number of the people one meets in this country."

Millicent laughed.

"Well, I'll be glad to see him when he comes." Her voice grew graver. "I feel grateful to him already for what he told you about George."

They went in together and half an hour later Nasmyth walked home across the moor. He had never thought more highly of Millicent, but somehow he now felt sorry for her. It scarcely seemed fitting that she should live in that lonely spot with only the company of an elderly and staid companion, though he hardly thought she would be happier if she plunged into a round of purposeless amusements in the cities. Still, she was young and very attractive; he felt that she should have more than the thinly-peopled countryside had to offer.

CHAPTER VII

ON THE MOORS

NEARLY a year had passed since Nasmyth's return when Lisle at length reached England. Soon after his arrival, he was, as Nasmyth's guest, invited to join a shooting party, and one bright afternoon he stood behind a bank of sods high on a grouse-moor overlooking the wastes of the Border. The heath was stained with the bell-heather's regal purple, interspersed with the vivid red of the more fragile ling, and where the uplands sloped away broad blotches of the same rich colors checkered the grass. In the foreground a river gleamed athwart the picture, and overhead there stretched an arch of cloudless blue. There was no wind; the day was still and hot.

A young lad whose sunburned face already bore the stamp of self-indulgence was stationed behind the butt with Lisle, and the latter was not favorably impressed with his appearance or conversation.

"Look out," he cautioned by and by. "You were a little slow last time. They travel pretty fast."

Lisle picked up his gun; he had used one in the West, though he was more accustomed to the rifle. Cutting clear against the dazzling sky, a straggling line of dark specks was moving toward him, and a series of sharp cracks broke out from the farther wing

of the row of butts, which stretched across the moor. Lisle watched the birds, with fingers tightening on his gun; one cluster was coming his way, each flitting body growing in size and distinctness with marvelous rapidity. Then there was a flash beside him, and another crash as he pitched up his gun. Something struck the heather with a thud not far away, and swinging the muzzle a little, he pulled again. He was not surprised to hear a second thud, and laying down his gun he turned to his youthful companion, while a thin cloud of acrid vapor hung about him.

"Get anything?" he asked.

"I didn't," was the sullen answer. "Couldn't expect it with the second barrel, after you'd filled the place with smoke. Wonder why Gladwyne's man gave you the old black powder?"

As nearly everybody else used smokeless, this was a point that had aroused Lisle's curiosity, though it was not a matter of much importance. Nasmyth had provided him with cartridges, but they had somehow been left behind, and on applying to Gladwyne's keeper he had been supplied with ammunition which, it seemed, was out of date.

"After all, you have done well enough," his companion resumed. "We'd better get on to our next station — it's right across the moor on the high ridge yonder. Don't bother about the birds."

"Shall I leave them there?"

"Certainly! Do you want to carry them all the afternoon? One of the keeper fellows will bring them along."

The lad's tone was half contemptuous; he had al-

ready shown that he considered the Canadian what he would have called an outsider; but he was willing to make use of him.

"You might look after Bella; she's alone in the next butt — and I've something else to do," he said. "There's an awkward ghyll to cross and she won't carry anything lighter than a 14-gun. See she doesn't leave the cartridges in it."

He strode away across the heather, and Lisle turned toward the turf shelter indicated. As he approached it, a girl appeared and glanced at him with very obvious curiosity; but as he supposed that she was the sister of his late companion he did not expect any diffidence from her. She was short in stature and slight in figure, and dressed in grayish brown; hat, coat, and remarkably short skirt all of the same material. Her hair was of a copper color; her eyes, which were rather narrow, of a pale grayish-green. He would have called them hard, and there was a hint of arrogance in her expression. Yet she was piquantly pretty.

"I suppose you're Nasmyth's Canadian friend?" she began, and went on without waiting for an answer: "As we occupy adjoining butts on the next drive, you may take my gun. Teddy has deserted me."

"Teddy?" queried Lisle, who wondered if she were referring to her brother. "I thought his name was Jim."

"It's Marple's stout friend with the dyed hair I mean. I told him what would happen if he ate as he persisted in doing at lunch. It's too hot to gormandize; I wasn't astonished when he collapsed at the steep

place on the last walk. Reflecting that it was his own fault, I left him."

Lisle was not charmed with the girl's manners, but he could not check a smile.

"Are you tired? You oughtn't to be," she continued with another bold glance at him.

"No," he replied; "if it's any consolation to you, I'm far from exhausted yet."

"That's reassuring," she retorted. "You haven't taken my gun."

Having forgotten it for the moment, he flushed a little, and she watched him with unconcealed amusement while he opened the weapon and took out the cartridges.

"What's that for?" she asked impertinently. "It's hammerless; there's nothing to catch."

"The pull-off's probably very light, if it's been made for a lady's use. It's sometimes possible to jar the strikers down when they set the springs to yield at a touch."

"Then you know something about guns?" she said, as if she had not expected this.

"Not a great deal about the scatter kind, though I've stripped a few."

"We never do that," she informed him. "We send them to London. Still, you're right; the gun did go off when I knocked it jumping down from a wall."

"If you'll let me have it to-night, I'll alter that. I understand we're going out again to-morrow."

She considered a moment.

"Well," she consented, with the air of one conferring a favor, "you may take it when we've finished."

Lisle wondered what had prompted him to make the offer. The way she had addressed him was not ingratiating, but he delighted in examining any fine mechanism and he had never handled such a beautifully made weapon.

They plodded on side by side through the heather, which was long and matted, and presently, seeing that she was breathless, he stopped on the crest of a higher rise and once more looked about with keen appreciation.

In front of him the crimson and purple heath was rent and fissured, and in the deep gaps washed out by heavy rains the peat gleamed a warm chocolate-brown. Elsewhere, patches of moss shone with an emerald brightness, and there were outcrops of rock tinted lustrous gray and silver with lichens. Below, near the foot of the moor, ran a straight dark line of firs, the one coldly-somber streak in the scene; but beyond it the rolling, sunlit plain ran back, fading through ever varying and softening colors to the hazy blue heights of Scotland.

Lisle's companion noticed his intent expression.

"It is rather fine up here," she conceded. "I sometimes feel it's almost a pity one couldn't live among the heather. Certain things would be easier on these high levels."

"Yes?" interrogated Lisle, slightly puzzled and astonished.

"You're obviously from the woods," she smiled. "If you had spent a few years among my friends, you would understand. I was referring to the cultivation of ideas and manners which seem to be considered out of date now."

Lisle made no reply to this, but he glanced too directly at a red stain on her hand.

"Blood," she explained. "I had a bet with Alan that I'd get a brace more than Flo; that's why I went after a cripple running in the ling. It wasn't dead when I picked it up — rather horrid, wasn't it?"

The man was conscious of some disgust. She looked very young and, slight as she was, her figure was prettily rounded and she had a soft, kittenish gracefulness; but she spoke with the assurance of a dowager. Though he had killed and cut up many a deer, he shrank from the small red stain on her delicate hand. She saw it and laughed, and then with a sudden change of mood she stooped and swiftly rubbed her fingers in the heather.

"Now," she said sharply, "if you're sufficiently rested, we'll go on."

Lisle moved away, but he asked a question:

"Do many girls shoot in this country?"

"No," she answered with a mocking smile; "not so many, after all. That's comforting, isn't it? This kind of thing is hard work, and damaging to the complexion."

Presently they came to a wall, and Lisle stopped in some uncertainty. It was as high as his shoulders and built of loose, rough stones.

"Get over," she ordered him. "Then pull a lot of it down."

He did so, making, though he endeavored to avoid this, a rather wide hole.

She scrambled through agilely and then regarded him with surprise as he proceeded to replace the stones.

"Why are you doing that?" she asked.

"There are sheep up here."

"Too many, considering that it's a grouse-moor; but what of it? They don't belong to us."

"They belong to somebody who would rather they didn't stray," Lisle rejoined. "In the country I come from, it's considered a serious transgression to knock over another person's fence and not put it up again."

He calmly went on with his task, and sitting down she took out a silver cigarette-case. After a minute or two she looked up at him.

"You're doing that very neatly," she remarked.

"I've done something of the kind for a living," Lisle informed her.

"Oh! It's curious that you seem proud of it. In this case, I don't mind your keeping me, because they can't drive up the birds until we have crossed the higher moor. It will annoy Gladwyne and his keeper, and I'm not pleased with either of them. I wanted Flo Marple's station at the first butts."

Lisle considered this. He had wondered why she had favored him with her company, when, although her previous companion had deserted her, she could by hurrying a little have joined the others. The butts were not spaced very far apart. Their late occupants had, however, now vanished into a dip of the moor. He asked himself why a girl with her assurance should have troubled to offer him an explanation.

When he had finished the repairs to the wall, they went on, and a little later he heard a sharp "Cruck — cruck-curruck," to one side of him. Swinging around, he saw a grouse skimming the heather.

"A pair of gloves to a sovereign that you miss!" cried his companion.

The bird was flying fast; Lisle had to load, and by the time he had snapped in a cartridge it was a long range. This, however, was somewhat in his favor, as he was better used to the rifle. There was a flash and the bird struck the heath. The girl glanced at him in unveiled appreciation.

"A clean kill!" she exclaimed. "You have won the gloves; and you'll deserve them before you have heard the last of this incident. I suppose you don't know that you shouldn't have fired a shot except from behind the butts."

She watched his expression with open amusement.

"You don't like to ask why I tempted you," she went on. "It was to vex the keeper; you may have turned back the birds the beaters are driving up."

"Thanks for the information," Lisle said coolly. "Do you mind my inquiring whether you would have taken the sovereign in case I'd missed? As you suggested, I'm lately from the wilds."

"Of course!" she mocked. "I could have had it drilled and worn it on a chain!"

The man made no comment as they went on. Presently they came to a deep rift in the moor through which a stream leaped sparkling. The girl scrambled down, waist-deep in yellow fern, but the other side was steep and stony and she was glad of help when he held out his hand. They made the ascent with some difficulty and on reaching the summit she looked around, breathless.

"This is a romantic spot, if you're interested in the legends of the Border," she told him.

"I am," Lisle said; and she sat down among the heather.

"It's an excuse for a rest," she confessed. "The old moss-troopers used to ride this way to ravage Cumberland. It was advisable for them to follow hidden paths among the moors, and once an interesting little skirmish took place among those brakes down the hollow."

She pointed toward a spot where the ravine widened into a level strip of quaggy grass and moss which glowed a brilliant emerald. On either side of it a gnarled and stunted growth of alders and birches fringed the foot of the steep slopes, and between them the stream spread out across a stretch of milk-white stones. The hollow was flooded with light and filled with the soft murmur of running water.

"It would be a strong place to hold, if the defenders had time to choose their ground," Lisle remarked.

"So it proved," replied his companion. "Well, once upon a time, a bold Scots reaver, riding south, saw a maid who pleased him near a Cumberland pele. His admiration was not reciprocated, but he came again, often, though being an armed thief by profession there was a price upon his head. It is stated that on each occasion he returned unaccompanied by any of the cattle belonging to his lady's relatives, which was an unusual piece of forbearance. In those days, men must have been able to disassociate business from their love-making."

"Don't they do so now?" Lisle inquired lazily.

She looked at him with a smile which had a hint of real bitterness in its light mockery.

"Not often, one would imagine. Perhaps they can't be blamed — I'm afraid we're all given to cultivating dreadfully expensive tastes. No doubt, when it was needful, the Border chieftain of the story could live on oatmeal and water, and instead of buying pedigree hunters he probably stole his pony. He haunted the neighborhood of the pele until the maid became afraid and urged her kinsmen to rid her of him. Several of them tried and failed — which wasn't surprising."

"Love made him invulnerable?" Lisle suggested.

"No," retorted his companion. "A man with a heart constant and stout enough to face the risks he ran would be hard to kill. When you read between the lines, it's a moving tale. Think of the long, perilous rides he made through an enemy's land, all for a glance at his disdainful lady! They watched the fords in those days, but neither brawling rivers nor well-mounted horsemen could stop him. At last, he came one night with a dozen spears, broke in the barmkin gate and carried her off. All her relatives rode hard after them and came up with them in this ghyll. Then there happened what was, in one way, a rather remarkable thing — the abducted maid firmly declined to be rescued. There was a brisk encounter, I believe two or three were killed; but she rode off to Scotland with her lover. I suppose I needn't point the moral?"

"I can see only the ancient one — that it's unwise to take a lady's 'No' as conclusive," Lisle ventured.

She laughed at him in a daring manner.

"The pity is that we haven't often a chance of saying it to any one worth while. But I'll express the moral in a prettier way — sometimes disinterested

steadfastness and real devotion count with us. Unfortunately, they're scarce."

There was a challenge in her glance, but the man, not knowing what was expected of him, made no answer. At first he had been almost repelled by the girl, but he was becoming mildly interested in her. She could, he thought, be daring to the verge of coarseness, and he did not admire her pessimism, which was probably a pose; but there was a vein of elfish mischief in her that appealed to him. Sitting among the heather, small, lithe, and felinely graceful, watching him with a provocative smile in her rather narrow eyes, she compelled his attention.

"Well," she laughed, "you're not much of a courtier. But doesn't that story bring you back into touch with elemental things — treacherous mosses, dark nights, flooded rivers, passion, peril, dauntlessness? Now we're wrapped about with empty futilities."

He understood part of what was in her mind and sympathized with it. He had lived close to nature in stern grapple with her unbridled forces. From women he demanded no more than beauty or gentleness; but a man, he thought, should for a time, at least, be forced to learn the stress and joy of the tense struggle with cold and hunger, heat and thirst, on long marches or in some dogged attack on rock and flood. He had only contempt for the well-fed idlers who lounged through life, not always, as he suspected, even gracefully. These, however, were ideas he had no intention of expressing.

"There are still people who have to face realities in the newer lands; and I dare say you have some in this country, on your railroads and in your mines, for ex-

ample," he said. "But hadn't we better be getting on?"

They left the brink of the hollow and plodded through the heather toward where a row of butts stood beneath a lofty ridge of the moor. A man appeared from behind one as they approached and glanced at them with unconcealed disapproval.

"Couldn't you have got here earlier, Bella?" he asked. "In another few minutes you'd have spoiled the drive — the birds can't be far off the dip of the ridge. Hardly fair to the keepers or the rest of us to take these risks, is it?"

"When I do wrong, I never confess it, Clarence," the girl replied. "You ought to know that by now."

Lisle heard the name and became suddenly intent — this was Clarence Gladwyne! There was no doubt that he was a handsome man. He was tall and held himself finely; he had a light, springy figure, with dark eyes and hair. Besides, there was a certain stamp of refinement or fastidiousness upon him which was only slightly spoiled by the veiled hint of languid insolence in his expression.

"I heard a shot," he resumed.

"I've no doubt you did," the girl agreed. "An old cock grouse got up in front of us — it was irresistibly tempting."

Gladwyne turned to Lisle with a slight movement of his shoulders which was somehow expressive of half-indulgent contempt.

"You're Nasmyth's friend from Canada? I guess you don't understand these things, but you might have made the birds break back," he said. "However, we

must get under cover now — there's your butt. I'll see you later."

He turned away and Lisle took up his station behind the wall of turf pointed to. He had once upon a time been forcibly rebuked for his clumsiness at some unaccustomed task in the Canadian bush and had not resented it, but the faint movement of Gladwyne's shoulders had brought a warmth to his face. The girl noticed this.

"Clarence can be unpleasant when he likes, but there are excuses for him," she said. "A day's shooting is one of the things we take seriously, and manners are not at a higher premium here than I suppose they are in the wilds."

Lisle made no response, and there was silence on the sun-steeped moor until a row of small dark objects skimming the crest of the ridge above became silhouetted against the sky. Then a gun cracked away to the right and in another moment a dropping fusillade broke out.

CHAPTER VIII

GLADWYNE RECEIVES A SHOCK

IT was about nine o'clock in the evening, and Gladwyne's somewhat noisy guests were scattered about his house and the terrace in front of it. Several of them had gathered in the hall, and Bella Crestwick, Lisle's companion on the moors, stood, cigarette in hand, with one foot on the old-fashioned hearth-irons, frankly discussing him. A few birch logs glowed behind the bars, for on those high uplands the autumn nights were chilly, but the wide door stood open, revealing a pale green band of light behind the black hills, and allowing the sweet, cool air of the moors to flow in.

The girl had gained something by the change from her outdoor attire to the clinging evening dress, but it was with characteristic unconcern that she disregarded the fact that the thin skirt fell well away from one shapely ankle effectively displayed by a stocking of the finest texture.

"The man," she said, "is a bit of a Puritan. They still live over there, don't they? His idea of English women is evidently derived from what his father told him, or from early-Victorian literature. I'm inclined to believe I shocked him."

"It's highly probable," laughed a man lounging near. "Still, I believe the descendants of the folks

you mention live three thousand miles from his country, in the neighborhood of the Atlantic shore. One wouldn't fancy that you'd like Puritans."

There was nothing offensive in the words, but his glance was a little too bold and too familiar, and Bella looked at him with a gleam of malice in her eyes.

"Extremes meet; it's the middle — the medium mediocrity — that's irreconcilable with either end," she retorted. "For instance, I led a life of severe asceticism all last Lent." There were incredulous smiles, though the statement was perfectly correct. "It's a course I could confidently recommend to you," she proceeded, unheeding; "of late you have been putting on flesh with an alarming rapidity."

The man made no response and Bella resumed:

"Besides, the Puritans have their good points; they're so refreshingly sure of themselves and their views, while the rest of us don't believe in anything. You can't be a fanatic without being thorough, and in renouncing the world and the flesh you may gain more than a passable figure. Among other things, the ascetic life means straight shooting, steady hands, and an eye you can depend upon. The overcivilized man who does nothing to counterbalance his luxuriousness is generally a rotter."

"But what has all this to do with Nasmyth's Canadian?" somebody asked.

Bella waved her cigarette.

"Try to walk a steep moor with him and you'll see. If that's not sufficient, take the same butt with him when the grouse are coming over."

Suddenly she straightened herself, dropping her foot from the iron and flinging the cigarette into the fire,

as a gray-haired lady entered the hall. She had been a beauty years ago and now her fragility emphasized the fineness of her features and the clear pallor of her skin. She was dressed in a thin black fabric, and her beautifully shaped hands gleamed unusually white against its somber folds.

"Where's Clarence?" she asked the group collectively, in a voice that was singularly clear and penetrative. "I haven't seen him for the last half-hour."

One of the men immediately went in search of him, and the lady crossed the hall to where Millicent Gladwyne was sitting, for the time being alone. Millicent had noticed Bella's sudden change of demeanor upon her hostess's entrance, with something between amusement and faint disgust. Mrs. Gladwyne was what Bella would have called early-Victorian in her views, and she would occasionally have been disturbed by the conversation of some of her son's guests, had she not been a little deaf.

"Sitting quiet?" she said to Millicent, who was a favorite of hers; and her voice carried farther than she was aware of as she continued: "I heard the laughter and it brought me down, though I want to tell Clarence something. I like to see bright faces; but the times have changed since I was young. We were a little more reserved and not so noisy then."

"A dear old thing! It's a pity she's quite so antediluvian," Bella remarked to a man at her side.

"Isn't that the natural penalty of being a dear old thing?" laughed her companion. "There's no doubt we have progressed pretty rapidly of late."

Clarence appeared shortly after this and was gently chidden by his mother for going out without his hat,

because the autumn nights were getting chilly. A few minutes later, footsteps became audible outside the open door and Nasmyth entered the hall with Lisle. It was spacious and indifferently lighted; the others, standing near the hostess, concealed her, and Lisle stopped for a word with Bella. Then Nasmyth noticed Mrs. Gladwyne and called to his companion.

"This way, Vernon."

Clarence swung round with a start and cast a swift glance at the stranger, and Millicent wondered why his face set hard; but the next moment Nasmyth led up the Canadian and presented him. Mrs. Gladwyne had risen and Lisle made a little respectful inclination over the delicate hand she held out. Age had but slightly spoiled her beauty; she had still a striking presence, and a manner in which a trace of stateliness was counterbalanced by gentle good-humor. Lisle was strongly impressed, but, as Millicent noticed, he betrayed no awkwardness.

"I seem to have heard your name before in connection with Canada," said Mrs. Gladwyne, confusing it with his surname. "Ah, yes! Of course; it was George's guide I was thinking of." She turned to Millicent, adding in an audible aside: "I've a bad habit of forgetting. Forgive me, my dear."

Everything considered, it was, perhaps, the most awkward thing she could have said; but Lisle's bronzed face was imperturbable, and Gladwyne had promptly recovered his composure as he realized the mistake. Still, for a moment, he had been badly startled. Nobody noticed Nasmyth, which was fortunate, because his unnatural immobility would have betrayed him.

"I'd been expecting you both earlier; told you to come to dinner," said his host.

Then he addressed Lisle.

"As my mother mentioned, I had once something to do with a man called Vernon, in Canada."

Knowing what he did, Lisle fancied that Gladwyne's indifferent tone had cost him an effort.

"It's only my Christian name, as you have heard," he explained.

"You were up in the bush with Nasmyth, were you not?"

"Yes," answered Lisle. "I met him quite by chance in a Victoria hotel when I happened to have a few weeks at my disposal which I thought of spending in the wilds. When he heard that I intended making a trip through the northern part of the country and suggested that we should go together I was glad to consent."

"Then you belong to Victoria?"

"I was located there when I met Nasmyth. Before that I was up in the Yukon district for some time. Since leaving him I've lived in the city."

He thought Gladwyne was relieved at his answer, for the latter smiled genially.

"Well," he said, "we must try to make your visit to this country pleasant."

Shortly after this, the group broke up and Gladwyne, escaping from his guests, slipped out on to the terrace and walked up and down. Nasmyth had merely mentioned that he had a Canadian friend staying with him; somehow a formal introduction had been omitted during the day on the moors, and Glad-

wyne had been badly disconcerted when he heard the man addressed as Vernon. The name vividly recalled a Canadian episode that he greatly desired to forget, and he had, indeed, to some extent succeeded in doing so. That unfortunate affair was done with, he had assured himself; for two years it had scarcely been mentioned in his hearing, but for a horrible moment which had taxed his courage to the utmost he had almost fancied that it was about to be brought to light again. Lisle's answer and manner had, however, reassured him. Nasmyth had met the man accidentally and it was merely as the result of this that they had made the journey through the bush together. It was evident that he had been needlessly alarmed.

For all that, he was troubled. Living for his own pleasure, as he did, he was nevertheless a man who valued other people's good opinion and prided himself upon doing the correct and most graceful thing. There was no doubt that he had once badly failed in this, but it was in a moment of physical weakness, when he was exhausted and famishing. After all, it was most probable that his cousin had died before he could have reached him, and there were, he thought, few men who, if similarly situated, would have faced the risk of the return journey. Still, the truth would have had an ugly sound had it come out. This was why he had spread the story of the guide's defection, which he now regretted. It might not have been strictly necessary, but he had reached the trappers' camp on the verge of a collapse, too far gone to reason out the matter calmly. A man in that condition could hardly be held accountable for his action. Besides, it was incredible that the guide's statement that

he had made the journey without replenishing his provisions could be correct.

His reflections were interrupted by Mrs. Gladwyne, who came out, wrapped in a shawl.

"Why are you here alone?" she asked. "You look disturbed. Has anything gone wrong?"

Gladwyne was sorry that she had joined him where the light from a window fell on his face, but he smiled.

"No," he answered quietly, for he was always gentle with her. "I only felt that I'd rather avoid the chatter of the others for a few minutes. I suppose it was the man's name, together with your reference to George, that upset me."

Mrs. Gladwyne laid her hand on his arm. She was inordinately fond and proud of the son whom she had spoiled.

"I sometimes think you are too sensitive on that point, Clarence," she said. "Of course, it was very tragic and we both owe George a great deal, but you did all that anybody could have done."

The man winced, and it was fortunate that they had now left the light behind and his mother could not see his face.

"I could have stayed and died with him," he broke out with unaffected bitterness. "There were times at the beginning when I was sorry I let him send me away."

Mrs. Gladwyne shook her head reproachfully. She was gracious and quietly dignified and refined in thought, but for all that she was not one to appreciate such a sacrifice as he had indicated.

"I'm afraid that was an undue exaggeration of a

natural feeling," she remonstrated. "How could your staying have helped him, when by going in search of help you increased his only chance of safety? I have always been glad you were clear-headed enough to realize it, instead of yielding to mistaken emotional inclinations."

Gladwyne felt hot with shame. His mother had an unshaken confidence in his honor, which was the less surprising because her perceptions had never been very keen and she had always shrunk from the contemplation of unpleasant things. It was an amiable weakness of hers to idealize those she loved, and by resolutely shutting her eyes on occasions she succeeded in accomplishing it more or less successfully. Clarence was, of course, aware of this, and it hurt to remember that in deserting his cousin he had been prompted chiefly by craven fear. His mother, however, quite unconscious of what she was doing, further humiliated him.

"Of course," she continued, "if you had found the cache of provisions, it would have been your duty to return to George at any hazard, and I have no doubt whatever that you would have gone."

The damp stood beaded on the man's forehead. He realized that even his lenient and indulgent mother would shrink from him if she knew that he had abandoned his dying benefactor like a treacherous coward. He said nothing and they had strolled to the end of the terrace before she spoke again.

"I think it would be better to go back to the others and drive away these morbid ideas," she advised. "It's a duty to look at the brightest side of everything."

He made no answer, but he strove with some degree of success to recover his usual tranquillity as they turned toward the entrance of the hall.

In the meanwhile, Lisle had been talking to Millicent. She had already made a marked impression on him, for in the wilds the man had acquired a swift and true insight into character. One has time to think in the lonely places where, since life itself often depends upon their accuracy, a man's perceptions grow keen, and though some of the minor complexities and subtleties of modern civilization might have puzzled him he was seldom mistaken in essentials.

He liked her direct and calmly searching gaze; he liked her voice which, while soft and pleasant, had a trace of gravity in it. He knew that her fine carriage was a sign of physical vigor and he recognized how it had been gained by the clear, warm tinting of her slightly sun-darkened skin. But, apart from this and her comeliness, which was marked, there was that in her personality which spoke of evenness and depth of character. She was steadfast, not lightly to be swayed from a resolve, he thought.

"Nasmyth has often spoken about you," she told him. "I understand it was chiefly by your help that he succeeded in reaching the scene of my brother's death. I want to thank you for that."

Her voice was quiet, but it did not betoken indifference; he knew that she was not one to forget. He could not think of any apposite answer, but she saw the sympathy in his eyes and it pleased her more than words would have done.

"It was a relief to me that Nasmyth made that journey," she went on. "I wanted to learn every-

thing that could be known — instead of shrinking from it. You see, I had a great faith in my brother."

"He deserved it," Lisle declared warmly. "I have gathered enough to convince me of that!"

"Thank you! Clarence was not in a condition to notice anything very clearly during his journey, and I think what he suffered blunted his recollection. Besides, the subject is a distressing one to him, and it is seldom he can be induced to speak about it. Perhaps that is a pity; I find it does not always save one trouble in the end to avoid a little immediate pain."

Lisle was gratified. She had spoken so unrestrainedly, though he imagined that it was a somewhat unusual thing for her to take a stranger into her confidence.

"Yes," he replied; "I think that's very true. It's better to face it and get it over. The wound sooner heals."

She smiled rather wistfully and changed the subject.

"I told Nasmyth that you taught him to see."

"I suppose I did," acknowledged Lisle. "Still, it was only as far as it concerned the things that I'm acquainted with. I'm not sure that my meaning's very clear?"

"I understand. You knew what to expect; that carries one a long way. Were you disappointed in finding it?"

He was a little surprised at her keenness, and rather confused. This was a question that could not be directly answered.

"What I was more particularly referring to was the meaning of such things as a broken branch, a gap

in a thicket, or a few displaced stones," he explained. "I taught him what to infer from those."

"Yes," she said; "I understand that you discovered nothing new — I mean nothing that could throw any further light upon what befell my brother after the others left him."

He was glad that he could answer her candidly.

"No; we can only suppose that the conclusions the rescue party came to were correct. But all that we found relating to the week or two before the separation spoke of the courageous struggle that your brother made and his generosity in sending the others away."

She bent her head.

"That," she said quietly, "is only what one would have expected. He left a diary; you must come over and see it."

"I should like to, if it wouldn't be painful to you."

"No," she replied; "I shall be glad to show it to you."

She left him shortly after this and strolled out on to the terrace, thinking about him. The little she had seen of him had pleased her; he had earnest eyes and a resolute air, and she liked the men who lived in the open. He was direct, and perhaps a little rudimentary without being awkward, which was in his favor, for subtlety of any kind was distasteful to her. Still, in one respect, she was disappointed — he had in no way amplified Nasmyth's story, and she had expected to hear a little more of the expedition from him.

CHAPTER IX

LISLE GATHERS INFORMATION

NASMYTH'S dinner was over and he lay, pipe in hand, in an easy-chair in his smoking-room, with Lisle lounging opposite him. They had been walking up partridges among the higher turnip fields all day, and now both were pleasantly tired and filled with languid good-humor. Nasmyth's house was old — it had been built out of the remains of a Border pele — and the room was paneled to the ceiling and very simply furnished. It had an ancient look and an ancient smell, and the few articles of plain oak furniture harmonized with it. The window stood wide open, and the fragrance of a grove of silver firs outside drifted in. The surroundings had their effect on Lisle, who had not been accustomed to dwellings of that kind.

"You have been here a fortnight and must have formed a few opinions about us," Nasmyth remarked at length. "You needn't be shy about expressing them, and I've no doubt there are things you'd like to ask."

"As a whole, my opinion's highly favorable," Lisle announced with a smile. "I'd be uncommonly hard to please if it weren't."

"That's flattering. But I'm not sure that I meant as a whole; I had a few particular instances in my

mind. Bella Crestwick, for example; I'm curious to hear what you think of her. She seems quite favorably impressed with you."

"She's interesting," Lisle replied. "A type that's new to me; the latest development, isn't it? Anyway, I like her — whatever the admission's worth — though I must say that I found her rather startling at first. She's honest, I think, and that counts for a good deal."

"I suppose you're not aware that she's desirably rich?"

"I wasn't. It's not a fact of any moment to me. Besides, I've a suspicion that it's Gladwyne's scalp she's after."

Nasmyth nodded.

"You're pretty shrewd. Though I've had much greater opportunities for observation, that idea has only lately occurred to me. Of course, in a general way, I shouldn't discuss my acquaintances in this casual fashion, but as you are likely to see a good deal of us there are things you'd better know."

"I'll explain my point of view," said Lisle, refilling his pipe. "You have seen something of the kind of life I've led. Half my time, I suppose, has been spent in primeval surroundings; the rest in contact with the latest efforts of a rather unfinished civilization. Well, what you have to show me here is vastly different. These old houses, your smoothed-down ways, are a revelation to me. The polish on some of your furniture has taken several hundred years to put on; that in my Victoria quarters smells of the factory, and the board walls of other hotels I've lived in rend into big cracks because they're fresh from the mill. I'm full of interest; everything's new to me.

But so far my curiosity's impersonal; I'm taking no hand in anything."

His companion's face grew grave.

"The trouble is that you may not be able to avoid it later. You're here, and some part will probably be forced on you. However, as I said, I think you're right about Bella."

"But her money would be no great inducement to Gladwyne."

"That's not certain. Clarence has a way of squandering money, and you may as well understand that there's very little to be derived from agricultural property. George had his mother's money, but he left it to Millicent; Clarence got only the land. That's what made a match between them seem so desirable."

"Desirable!" Lisle broke out. "It's impossible! Not to be contemplated!"

"Yes," Nasmyth agreed quietly. "If necessary, it will have to be prevented. I was only stating popular opinion."

There was something curious in his tone and Lisle looked hard at him. Their eyes met full for a moment and the thoughts of each were clear to the other.

"If anything must be done, it will fall to you," Nasmyth went on. "In this case it would be particularly invidious for me to interfere. But, if there had been nobody else, I'd have broken off the match."

Lisle made no comment, but there was comprehension and sympathy in his expression, and Nasmyth nodded.

"Yes," he acknowledged; "it's an open secret that I would have looked for nothing better than to marry

Millicent Gladwyne." He paused with a slight flush creeping into his bronzed face. "For all that, I knew some years ago that I hadn't the faintest chance and never would have. I have her confidence and friendship; that has to be enough."

"I think it's a good deal," said Lisle.

There was silence for a minute or two, and then Lisle asked a question:

"How could a girl like Millicent Gladwyne ever contemplate the possibility of marrying Clarence?"

"It's puzzling to me. These things often are to outsiders. Still, Clarence is a handsome man, and I think George was in favor of the match, which would count with her. Then, in a way, she was always fond of Clarence, and now that she has the money and he's far from prospering on the land, the idea that she could set him firmly on his feet by sharing her possessions with him may prove tempting. It's very much the sort of thing that would appeal to her."

"You suggest that she isn't strongly attached to the man."

"I really believe she isn't; but, for all that, I'm sometimes afraid she'll end by marrying him. It's very probable that she suspects some of his faults, but I'm not sure they'd deter her. It would make her more compassionate, believing it was her duty to help him — that kind of thing's an old delusion. Still, to do the fellow justice, he hasn't of late shown much eagerness to profit by his opportunities."

Lisle mused for a few moments. It struck him that Nasmyth had described a very fine type of woman, which was quite in accordance with his own ideas of Miss Gladwyne.

"What led Gladwyne to cultivate Marple and the Crestwicks?" he asked. "They're different from the rest of you."

"I can't say. It's a point I've wondered about, though Marple and his rather rowdy friends are prosperous. I can better see why they got hold of Clarence."

"I don't see it," responded Lisle. "Remember I'm an unsophisticated stranger in search of information. If they've means enough, can't they associate with whom they like?"

Nasmyth smiled, but there was a trace of diffidence in his manner.

"In a way, you're right; but there are limits, more particularly in such a place as this. The counties, I'm sometimes thankful, don't keep pace with London. It's a little difficult to explain, but we're old-fashioned and possibly prejudiced here. Anyhow, we exercise a certain amount of caution in the choice of our friends."

"But Mrs. Gladwyne seems cordial to the people you object to, and one would imagine that she's the embodiment of your best traditions, a worthy representative of the old régime."

"Mrs. Gladwyne is a remarkably fine lady, but it's unfortunate that she's a little deaf and — it must be owned — not particularly intelligent. A good deal of what goes on escapes her. Besides, she has always idolized Clarence, and that would account for her not seeing his friends' failings."

"It's curious that Gladwyne makes so much of that young Crestwick."

"I've wondered about it," Nasmyth confessed. "The lad's vicious — and I've an idea that the influ-

ence Clarence has over him isn't beneficial. In fact, I'm sorry for his sister. She has been given her head too young, but, in my opinion, the girl's the pick of a very indifferent bunch."

"But you haven't accounted for these people's desire to be on good terms with Gladwyne."

Nasmyth hesitated.

"Oh, well, since you're so persistent, the Crestwicks have evidently been left with ample means, acquired by their parents, not much education, and big ambitions. They can get into certain circles, but that won't content them, and other doors, which Gladwyne can open to them, are shut. After all, he's a good sportsman, a man of some culture, with a manner that's likely to impress such people. The lad's holding on to him and taking his worst aspect for a copy, while Clarence seems willing to extend his patronage."

"For some consideration?"

Nasmyth looked disturbed.

"It's unpleasant, but I can't help feeling that you're right. One way or another, young Crestwick will have to pay his entrance fees." He rose and stretched himself lazily. "I'll spoil my temper if I say any more about it, and as we've had a long day I'm off to bed."

Lisle followed him from the room, but he was up early the next morning and strolled down to the river while the light was creeping across the moors and the dew lay thick upon the grass, thinking over what he had heard on the previous night. It was his nature to be interested in almost everything and he was curious to learn what he could of the people to whom his father had belonged. In Canada he had, for the

most part, met only men of somewhat primitive habits and simple desires, grappling with rock and forest, or with single purpose toiling to acquire wealth in the new cities. What was more to the purpose, few of them were married. Now he was thrown among a people not more intelligent — indeed, he thought they were less endowed with practically useful knowledge — but in some respects more complex, actuated by different and less obvious ambitions and desires. He felt impelled to watch them, though he recognized that, as Nasmyth had predicted, this might not be all. It was possible that sooner or later he would be drawn into action.

He reached the stream at a spot where it flowed, still and clear, beneath a birch wood. A few of the leaves were green, but most of them gleamed a delicate saffron among the gray and silver stems, and the ground beneath was flecked with yellow. Behind the trees rough, lichened rock and stony slopes ran up to a bare ridge, silhouetted against the roseate glow of the morning sky. The sun had not risen, the water lay in shadow; it was very quiet and rather cold, and Lisle was surprised to see Millicent Gladwyne picking her way cautiously over a bank of stones. It was only her movements that betrayed her, for her neutral-tinted attire harmonized with the background; but when she caught sight of him she left the foot of the slope she was skirting and came directly toward him. He thought she looked wonderfully fresh and wholesome, and he noticed that she carried a small camera.

"I'm afraid you have spoiled my sport," she laughed. "I was after an otter — though you mustn't tell Nasmyth that there is one about here."

"Certainly not," acquiesced Lisle. "But why?"

"He would consider it his duty to bring up the hounds the next meet. Isn't it curious how slaughter appeals to a man? But Nasmyth isn't unreasonable; there are reserves in which even the jays he longs to shoot have sanctuary."

"But you were looking for an otter?"

"Yes; I wanted its picture, not its life. I've got several, but I'm not satisfied; though I've been lucky lately. I got a dabchick — they're growing scarce — not long ago."

"We'll try the next pool, if you'll let me come," suggested Lisle. "I'm pretty good at trailing. But what do you want with their pictures?"

"For my book," she told him. "I have to make ever so many drawings in color before I get them right. If you're fond of the wild creatures, I'll show them to you."

Lisle said that he would be delighted, and they went on, keeping back among tall brushwood where they skirted the swift stream at the head of the pool, and then proceeding cautiously with the outline of their figures softened by the heathy slopes behind. At length, creeping up through a thin growth of alders, they stopped near another still reach and the girl pointed to a few floating objects on its surface.

"You're good at trailing or they'd have taken fright," she said. "Still, I think I will surprise you, if you will wait here."

"Mallard," Lisle commented. "Young birds — even where we seldom disturb them, they're shy."

She slipped away through the alders and he noticed how little noise she made, though the lower branches

here and there brushed against her gliding form. She was wonderfully light and graceful in her movements. As she came out into the open there was a startled quack or two from the birds. Lisle expected to see them rise from the water, but she called softly and, to his vast astonishment, they ceased paddling away from her. She called again and they turned and swam cautiously toward her, and when she took a handful of something from a pocket and flung it upon the surface of the stream, three or four heads were stretched forward to seize the morsels.

While the birds drew nearer Lisle looked on admiring. She had roused his interest when he had first seen her in her rich evening dress, but now he thought she made a far more striking picture, and her sympathy with the timid wild creatures which evidently knew and trusted her awakened something responsive in him. Half the pool now glimmered in the rosy light, with here and there an alder branch reflected upon its mirror-like surface, and Millicent stood on a strip of gravel with her figure clearly outlined against it. Dressed in closely-fitting, soft-colored tweed, tall and finely symmetrical, she harmonized with rock and flood wonderfully well. Lisle had occasionally seen a bush rancher's daughter, armed with gun or fishing-rod, look very much at home in similar surroundings; but this English lady, of culture and station, reared in civilized luxury, appeared equally in her right place.

He afterward recollected each adjunct of the scene — the stillness, the pale gleam of the water, and the aromatic smell of fallen leaves, but the alluring, central figure formed the sharpest memory. By and by she clapped her hands, the ducks rose and flew away

up-stream with necks stretched out, and she came back toward him, laughing softly.

"Sometimes they will come almost up to my feet; but I'm afraid it's hardly fair to inspire them with an undue confidence in human nature. It might cost them dear."

"You're wonderful!" Lisle exclaimed, expressing what he felt, for she seemed to him endowed with every gracious quality.

"Oh," she smiled, "there's nothing really remarkable in what I showed you. I happened to find the nest and by slow degrees disarmed the mother bird's suspicions; mallard have been domesticated, you know, though they're often hard to get very near. But we may as well turn back; it's now too late to see an otter. I'm inclined to think they're the shyest of all the British wild creatures."

They moved away down-stream side by side, and some time later she left him where a stile-path crossed a meadow.

"Come and see my drawings whenever you like," she said on parting.

Lisle determined to go as soon as possible. Quite apart from the drawings, the idea of going had its attractions for him, and he walked homeward determined that this girl should never marry Clarence Gladwyne. It was unthinkable — that was the only word for it.

CHAPTER X

BELLA'S CHAMPION

IT was early in the afternoon when Lisle arrived at Millicent's house and, after a glance at its quaint exterior, was ushered into her drawing-room. There he sat down and looked about while he waited. The salient tones of its decoration were white and aqueous blue, and the effect struck him as pleasantly chaste and cool. Among the rather mixed ornaments were a couple of marble statuettes, the figures airily poised and very finely wrought. Next, he noticed some daintily carved objects in ivory, and a picture in water-color of a wide, gray stretch of moor with distance and solitude skilfully conveyed. He had risen to examine it when Millicent entered.

"I'm glad you came, though, as you're used to the life of the woods and rivers, I'm a little diffident about showing you my sketches," she said. "I'm afraid I've kept you waiting."

Lisle smiled and she liked the candidly humorous gleam in his eyes.

"Nasmyth warned me that I was early — or rather he said that if I were going to visit anybody else I would have been too soon. I'd better confess, however, that I've been making a good use of the time. Things of this kind"— he indicated the statuettes — "are almost new to me. They strike me as unusually fine."

"Yes," she answered, realizing that he had an artistic eye, "they are beautiful — and one sees so many that are not. George brought them from Italy for me. This "— she moved toward a representation in ivory of a Mogul gateway —" is of course a different style, but it's remarkable in its patient elaboration of detail. The mosque's not so fine. Nasmyth sent me the pair from India; he once made a trip to the fringe of the Himalayas."

Lisle examined the object carefully, and she waited with some interest for his comment.

"It's wonderful," he declared. "I suppose it's a truthful copy?"

"I'm inclined to think the man who carved that had not the gift of imagination. He merely reproduced faithfully what he saw."

"Different peoples have strikingly different ways, haven't they?" commented Lisle. "While they were making that small Eastern arch, we'd fling up a thriving wooden town or build a hotel of steel and cement to hold a thousand guests. The biggest bridges that carry our great freight-trains across the roaring gorges in the Rockies cost less labor."

"I should imagine it. What then?"

He studied the carved ivory.

"In a dry climate the orginal of this would last for centuries — it has lasted since the days of the Moguls — an object of beauty for generations to enjoy. Perhaps those old builders used their time as well as we do. Our works serve their purpose, but one can't call them pretty."

She was pleased with his answer.

"I think that gets the strongest hold on me," he

went on, glancing toward the picture of the moor; "it's real!"

There was a hint of diffidence in Millicent's expression.

"But you can hardly judge, can you? You have scarcely seen the English moors."

"I've spent a while on the high Albertan plains, and you have the same things yonder; the vast sweep of sky, the rolling waste running on forever. It's all in that picture; how expressed, I don't know — there are only the grades of color, scarcely a line to gage the distance by. Still, the sense of space is vivid."

Millicent blushed.

"You're an indulgent critic; that drawing is my own."

He did not appear embarrassed, though she saw that he had not suspected the fact. She had already noticed that when he might, perhaps, have looked awkward he only looked serious.

"After what you have said," she resumed, "I'll show you the other things with greater confidence. Do you know, I thought all you Western people were grimly utilitarian?"

He sat down and considered this. The man could laugh readily, but he was also characterized by a certain gravity, which she found refreshing by contrast with the light glibness to which she was more accustomed.

"Well," he reasoned, "in my opinion, the white man's greatest superiority over all other peoples is his capacity for making useful things — even if they're only ugly sawmills or grimy locomotives. Philosophy never fed any one or lightened anybody's toil; com-

merce is a convenience, but the man who makes a big profit out of it is only levying a heavy toll on somebody else. It seems to me that all our actual benefits come from the constructor."

"Have you been building sawmills?" Millicent asked mischievously.

He laughed with open good-humor. "Oh, no; that's why I'm free to talk. I happened to find a lode with some gold in it, and gold is only a handy means of exchanging things. I'll own that I was probably doing more useful work when I stood up to my waist in ice-water, fitting sharp stones into a pulp-mill dam."

"Perhaps you're right," Millicent agreed, "but it sounds severe. What of the people who never do anything directly useful at all?"

"There are a few who, by just going up and down in it, keep the world sweet and clean. Some of the rest could very well be spared."

"Then you believe that everybody must practically justify his existence?"

"If he fails to do so with us, his existence generally ceases. The wilderness where I found the gold is full of the bones of the unfit."

Millicent spread out some drawings. Most were in color, in some cases several of the same object, done with patient care, and she was strangely pleased when she saw the quick appreciation in his eyes.

"An otter; it's alive," he remarked. "You've shown it working through a shallow, looking much less like an animal than a fish — that's right."

"I made half a dozen sketches, and I'm not satisfied yet."

"Thorough," he commented. "You get there, if you have to hammer the heart out of whatever you're up against."

"It's my brother's book," she answered. "I'm finishing it for him. He did other things — most of them useful, indirectly. I've only this — and I'd like my part to be good."

He nodded sympathetically, looking troubled.

"I can understand," he said. "I had a partner — I owe him more than I could ever have repaid, and he left a troublesome piece of work to me. It will have to be put through. But let me see some more; they're great."

She showed him a red jay; a tiny gold-crest perched on a thorn branch; a kingfisher gleaming with turquoise hues, poised ready for a dive upon a froth-lapped stone. He was no cultured critic, but he knew the ways of the wild creatures and saw that she had talent, for her representations of them were instinct with life.

They were interrupted by a scratching at the door and when she opened it a white setter hobbled awkwardly in and curled itself at her feet.

"He's rather a big dog for the house, but I can't keep him away from me," she explained. "As you see, he has lost a foot, in a trap, and he was marked for destruction when I asked for him. Sometimes I think he knows that I saved his life."

The dog looked up and raising a paw scraped at her hand, until she opened it, when he thrust his chin into her palm. It was a trivial incident, but it somehow stirred the man.

"Now I know where you got power to draw these

lesser brethren," he said. "Study alone would never have given it to you."

She let this pass. He was almost embarrassing in his directness, though she acquitted him of any crude intention of flattering her.

"I promised to let you read my brother's diary," she reminded him. "If you will wait a few moments, I'll get it."

The dog pattered after her, as though unwilling to remain out of her sight, and she came back presently with a small leather case and opening it took out a tattered notebook. Noticing how she handled it and that the case was beautifully made, Lisle fancied that it was precious to her, in which he was correct. Indeed, she was then wondering why she had volunteered to show it to this stranger when only two of her intimate friends had seen it.

"Thank you," he said, when she gave it to him; and drawing his chair nearer the window he began to read.

Though he was already acquainted with most of it, the story gripped him. On the surface, it was merely a plain record of a hazardous and laborious journey; but to one gifted with understanding it was more than this — a vivid narrative of a struggle waged against physical suffering, weakness, and hunger, by optimistic human nature. An odd word here, a line or two in another place, was eloquent of simple, steadfast courage and endurance; and even when the weakening man clearly knew that his end was near there was no outbreak of desperation or sign of faltering. He had dragged himself onward to the last, indomitable.

Then Lisle proceeded to examine the book more closely. It showed the effects of exposure to the weather to an unusual degree, considering that the covers were thick and that the rescue party had recovered it shortly after its owner's death. Moreover, Lisle did not think that George Gladwyne would have left it in the snow. Several pages were missing, and having been over the ground, he knew that they recorded the part of the journey during which the two caches of provisions had been made, and he had already decided that there would be a list of their contents. This conclusion was confirmed by the fact that Gladwyne had enumerated the stores they started with, and had once or twice made a reduced list when they had afterward taken stock. The abstraction of the records was clearly Clarence's work. Then he realized that he had spent some time in perusing the diary and he handed it back to Millicent with something that implied a respect for it. She noticed the sparkle in his eyes and her heart warmed toward him.

"It's the greatest story I've ever read," he declared.

She made no answer, but he knew that she was pleased and it filled him with a wish to tell her that she was very much like her dead brother. More he could not have said, but remembering that he had already gone as far as was permissible he had sense enough to repress the inclination. He saw the girl's lips close firmly, as if she were conscious of some emotion, but there was silence for a minute or two. He broke it at length.

"I know that you have granted me a very great privilege, and I'm grateful," he told her, and added, because he thought a partial change of the subject

might be considerate: "In a way, it's hard to realize that tale in this restful place. It's easier out yonder, where what you could call the general tone is different."

"Nasmyth once said something like that," Millicent replied. "I suppose the change is marked."

Lisle nodded.

"Here you have order, peace, security. In the wilds, it's all battle, the survival of the strong; frost and ice rending the solid hills, rivers scoring out deep ravines, beast destroying beast, or struggling with starvation. Man's not exempt either; a small blunder — a deer missed or a flour bag lost — may cost him his life. For the difference you have to thank the constructor, the maker of plows and spades and more complex machines."

"That's one of your pet hobbies, isn't it?"

He once more changed the subject.

"I wish that I could show you the wilderness," he said.

Millicent looked thoughtful.

"I should like to see it. I've an idea that if this book is well received I might, perhaps, try something a little more ambitious — the larger beasts and wilder birds of other countries. In that case, I should choose British Columbia."

"Then you will let me be your guide?"

She made a conditional promise, and shortly afterward he left her. Meeting Nasmyth he walked with him toward Gladwyne's house, where they found the guests assembled on the lawn and Mrs. Gladwyne sitting by a tea-table. One or two young women were standing near and several men had gathered about a

mat laid upon the grass fifty yards from where a small target had been set up. Lisle joined Bella Crestwick, who detached herself from the others.

"What is this?" he asked. "It's a very short range."

"Miniature rifle shooting," she informed him. "It's becoming popular. Gladwyne has been trying to form a club. My brother Jim is president of some league. He's rather keen and there are reasons why I'm glad of it."

She added the last words confidentially and Lisle ventured to nod. It struck him that a healthy interest in any organized work or amusement would be beneficial to young Crestwick. The girl looked at him, as if considering something; and then she seemed to make up her mind.

"There's one thing I don't like," she complained. "They will shoot for high stakes. Jim isn't a bad shot, but he's too eager. I'm afraid he's inclined to be venturesome just now."

Lisle thought that she had a request to make. There was something about him that inspired confidence, and the girl had made a friend of him.

"What do you want me to do?" he asked.

She made a sign of impatience; he was too direct. "Oh," she pouted, "aren't you taking a good deal for granted? Still, you bushmen can shoot, can't you?"

"As a rule," Lisle answered. "I almost think I see."

"Then," she retorted, "you shouldn't have said so; you should merely have smiled and acted."

"I'm from the wilds; you mustn't expect too much. Well, if you'll excuse me."

She flashed a grateful glance at him, and he sauntered toward the group of men, among whom Gladwyne stood. There was a sharp crack as he approached them, a thin streak of smoke drifted across the figure lying on the mat, and a man beside it lowered the glasses he held.

"High to the left," he announced. "You're not in good form, Jim. Hadn't you better give up?"

Lisle studied the speaker, whom he had met once or twice already. He was approaching middle-age and was inclined to corpulence, but there was something in his pose that suggested a military training. His face was fleshy, but the features were bold and he was coarsely handsome. As a rule, he affected an easy good-humor, but Lisle had felt that there was something about him which he could best describe as predatory. He occasionally spoke of business ties, so he had an occupation, but he had not in Lisle's hearing mentioned what it was.

Crestwick's face was hot as he answered his remark.

"Not at all, Batley. The trouble is that I'm used to the Roberts target, and the spots on the card are puzzling after the rings. I'll get into it presently."

"Oh, well," acquiesced the other. "As you didn't fix a time limit, we'll go on again, though it's getting tame and I want some tea."

"I'll increase the interest again, if you like," the lad replied.

Lisle joined the group.

"What's it all about?" he asked.

"Batley's a pretty good rifle shot, but if he won't mind my saying so he's a little opinionated," Glad-

wyne explained. "Crestwick questioned an idea of his, and the end of it was that Batley offered to prove his point — that a stiff pull-off is as good as a light one in practised hands — by backing himself to beat the field. Crestwick took him up, and since the rest of us were obviously out of it, the thing has resolved itself into a match between the two. Crestwick is using an easy-triggered rifle; Batley's has an unusually hard spring."

Lisle considered. Remembering Bella's remarks, he thought it would be easy to lure the lad into a rash bet. He was headstrong and his manners might have been more conciliatory, but Lisle, learning the amount of the stakes, decided that his host should not have let the thing go so far.

"Crestwick doubled several times; he's stubborn and doesn't like to be beaten," Gladwyne resumed. "I had the same ideas when I was as young as he is."

"I've offered to let him off," Batley broke in. "I'd do so now only he's kept me shooting for the last half-hour. As Gladwyne says, he's obstinate, and it's a pity that he's wrong. If he'd trained his wrist-tendons by using a harder trigger, he'd have made a passably good shot."

Lisle was aware that while there was something to be said for Batley's view, Crestwick was justified in contending that the lighter tension was more adapted to the case of the average person; but he recognized that the indulgent manner of the older men was calculated, he thought intentionally, to exasperate the hot-headed lad.

"Well," he observed, addressing Batley, "you have the courage of your convictions if you have offered to

maintain them against all comers, which I understand is what you have done."

The man nodded carelessly and Lisle went on:

"After all, since I dare say these gentlemen are more used to the shotgun, your superiority doesn't prove very much."

Crestwick looked around at him quickly.

"Most of you Colonials can use the rifle; do you feel inclined to take him on? You're a dark horse, but I'll double the stakes if he'll throw you in."

This was what Lisle wanted, but he turned to the others.

"I've never had a small rifle in my hands — we use the 44–70, and I must leave you to decide whether my shooting would be fair to Mr. Batley. In that case, I'll put up half the stakes."

The men said there was no reason why he should not join, and Batley made no protest, though Lisle fancied that he was not pleased. Lying down on the mat, he took the light-springed rifle and the six cartridges handed him and fixed his eyes on the target, which was a playing-card pinned to a thick plank. He got the first shot off before he was quite ready — the light pull was new to him — and somebody called that he had touched the left top corner. The next shot was down at the bottom, and the four following marks were scattered about the card. When he got up, Batley looked reassured and proceeded to make a neat pattern around the center of another card. There was no doubt that Crestwick was anxious, and when he took his turn he shot badly. In the meanwhile, the rest of the party on the lawn had gradually gathered round; the eager attitude of the original

spectators hinted that something out of the usual course was going on.

Lisle was very cool when he lay down again. A swift, encouraging glance from Bella Crestwick made him determined, and during his previous six shots he had, he thought, learned the right tension on the trigger.

"Wipe it out for me, somebody," he said, holding up the rifle.

Bella seized it and deftly used the rod, regardless of soiled fingers.

"May it bring you luck," she wished, with a defiant glance at Batley, who smiled at her as she returned the weapon.

Then there was a hush of expectancy. Lisle took his time; a sharp crack, a streak of smoke, and Gladwyne raising his glasses, laughed.

"High!" he called. "Top spot!"

It was a three of hearts, and Gladwyne's smile lingered for a moment after Lisle fired again.

"Bottom now; you're low!" he cried, and then his expression slightly changed. Both spots were drilled out — this did not look altogether like an accident.

"Center!" he announced after another shot, and all the faces surrounding him became intent. The three hearts were neatly punched.

"A fresh card!" exclaimed Crestwick, looking around at Batley with an exultant sparkle in his eyes. "You offered to let me off. Shall I return the compliment?"

The man laughed carelessly, though Lisle thought it cost him an effort.

"No," he retorted; "I can't show myself less of a

sportsman than you are; but I think I've the option of demanding a longer range. Move the mat back twenty-five yards and put up an ace of spades; it's the plainest. Three shots each should suffice at the distance."

Crestwick got down and thrice touched the outside of the card; Batley did better, for two shots broke the edge of the black and one was close above them. It was good shooting at so small a mark, and Lisle was a little anxious as he very deliberately stretched himself out on the mat. Having little of the gambler's instinct in his nature, he was reluctant to lose the money at stake, but he was more unwilling to let Batley fleece the lad whom, as he recognized now, he had been asked to aid. He meant to do so, if the thing were possible, and twice he paused and relaxed his grip when his sight grew slightly blurred.

Then there was a sharp crack, and he smiled when he heard Gladwyne's report.

"I can't see it. These are only opera-glasses."

Dead silence followed the next shot, which left no visible mark on the target; and Lisle did not look around as he thrust his last cartridge into the rifle. He let it lie beside him for half a minute while he opened and shut his right hand, and then, taking it up quickly, fired. Still there was no blur on the white surface of the card and Gladwyne sharply shut his glasses, while two of the onlookers ran toward the target. They came back in silence and one significantly held up the ace. There were three small holes in the black center.

Gladwyne had turned away when Lisle got up, but Batley concealed his feelings very well.

"Excellent!" he exclaimed. "As I can't beat that, the only thing left me is to pay up."

Lisle turned to Crestwick, who looked hot and excited.

"You made the bet," he said. "Will you use my half in buying a competition cup for one of your clubs?"

He saw Batley's smile and a somewhat curious look in Gladwyne's face, but the group broke up and he strolled back across the lawn with Bella.

"I'm grateful," she said softly. "I was a little afraid at first that I was asking too much of you."

Lisle met her glance with a good assumption of surprise.

"Grateful? Because I indulged in a rather enjoyable match?"

She laughed.

"You learn rapidly. But I'd better say in excuse that I didn't think I'd involved you in a very serious risk. He hasn't your eyes and hands — one couldn't expect it. You don't need pick-me-ups in the morning, do you?"

Lisle was slightly embarrassed. This girl's knowledge of life was too extensive, and he would have preferred that she should exhibit it to somebody else.

"Well," she concluded as they approached the tea-table, "my thanks are yours, even if you don't value them."

"What do you expect me to say?" he asked, regarding her with some amusement and appreciation. She was alluringly pretty in her rather elaborate light dress.

"Yes," she smiled mockingly, disregarding his ques-

tion; "these things become me better than the tweeds, don't they? They make one look nice and soft and fluffy; but that's deceptive. You see, I can scratch; in fact, I felt I could have scratched Batley badly if I'd got the chance. There's another hint for you — make what you like of it."

Then with a laugh she swung round and left him, puzzled.

CHAPTER XI

CRESTWICK GIVES TROUBLE

THE little room in Marple's house, where the Crestwicks were staying, was hot and partly filled with cigar smoke which drifted in filmy streaks athwart the light of the green-shaded hanging-lamp. Lisle sat beneath the lamp, studying the cards in his hand, until he leaned back in his chair and flung a glance about the table. There were no counters on it, but Gladwyne had just noted something in a little book and was waiting with a languid smile upon his handsome face. Next to him sat Batley, looking thoughtful; and Crestwick sat opposite Lisle, eager and unhealthily flushed. His forehead showed damp in the lamplight and there was an unpleasant glitter in his eyes. It was close on to midnight and luck had gone hard against him during the past hour, half of which Lisle had spent in his company. This had cost Lisle more money than he was willing to part with.

"It's getting late," he said with a yawn. "After this hand, I'll drop out; I dare say one of the other two will take my place. Crestwick, I believe your sister and Miss Leslie will be waiting. You're going with them, aren't you?"

The lad, turning in his chair, reached toward a near-by table on which there were bottles and siphons, and took a glass from it. He had been invited to join

a shooting party at a house in the neighborhood and was to spend the night there.

"Oh!" he exclaimed with some irritation; "Bella's always in such an unreasonable hurry. The others can't be going yet. I think I hear Flo Marple singing."

A voice from somewhere below reached them through the open door. It was a good voice, but the words were a silly jingle and the humor in them could not be considered delicate. Lisle, glancing at Gladwyne, noticed his slight frown, but one of the two young men lounging by the second table watching the game hummed the refrain with an appreciative smile upon his heavy and somewhat fatuous face.

"They'll take half an hour to get ready," declared Batley. "Better play out this round, anyhow."

They laid down their cards in turn and then Crestwick noisily thrust his chair back.

"Another knock-out!" he exclaimed savagely. "I don't like to get up so far behind. Shall we double on another deal?"

"As you like," returned Batley. "You're plucky, considering the cards you've had; but if Fortune's fickle, she's supposed to favor a determined suitor."

It was innocent enough, but Lisle fancied that there was sufficient flattery in the speech to incite the headstrong lad, who had now emptied the glass at his hand. He remembered that on another occasion when there had been a good deal at stake, Batley had played on Crestwick's feelings, though in a slightly different manner. Whether or not the young man lost more than he could afford was, in one way, no concern of Lisle's, and he did not find him in the least at-

tractive; but half an hour previously Bella had met him in the hall and had hinted, with a troubled look, that she would appreciate it if he could get her brother away. It was this that accounted for the Canadian's presence in the card-room.

"I'm going, anyway," he said, taking out some notes and gold and laying them down. "There has been a smart shower and you had better remember that Miss Leslie walked over — the roads will be wet. As you know, I promised to take the girls back in Nasmyth's trap, and he won't thank me if I keep his groom up."

Crestwick grumbled and hesitated, and he grew rather red in face as he turned to Batley.

"I've only these two notes," he explained. "Expected all along I'd pull up even. Will you arrange things? See you about it when I come back."

Batley nodded carelessly, and the lad stood up, looking irresolutely at the table.

"Fact is," he went on, "I'd like to get straight before I go. I'm in pretty heavy for one night; another round might do something to set me straight."

"Gladwyne and I are quite willing to give you your chance," was Batley's quick reply; but Lisle unceremoniously laid his hand on Crestwick's shoulder.

"Come along," he urged, laughing. "Luck's against you; you've had quite enough."

He had the lad out of the door in another moment, and looking back from the landing he saw a curious look in Gladwyne's face which he thought was one of disgust. Batley, however, was frowning openly; and the two men's expressions had a meaning for him. He was inclined to wonder whether he had used force

too ostensibly in ejecting the lad; but, after all, that did not very much matter — his excuse was good enough. As they went down the stairs, Crestwick turned to him, hot and angry.

"It strikes me you're pretty officious! Never saw you until two or three weeks ago," he muttered. "Not accustomed to being treated in that offhand manner. It's Colonial, I suppose!"

"Sorry," Lisle apologized with a smile. "I've an idea that you'll be grateful when you cool off. You've been going it pretty strong to-night."

"That's true," agreed the other with a show of pride. "Kept on raising them; made things lively!"

"Found it expensive, didn't you?" Lisle suggested; and as they reached the foot of the stairs he led his companion toward the door. "Suppose we take a turn along the terrace before we look for your sister."

Crestwick went with him, but presently he stopped and leaned on the low wall.

"Do you ever feel inclined for a flutter on the stock-market?" he inquired. "There's a thing Batley put me on to — there'll be developments in a month or two; it's going to a big premium. Let you have a hundred shares at par. Rather in a hole, temporarily."

Lisle had no intention of buying the stock, but he asked a few questions. It appeared that it had been issued by a new company formed to grow coffee and rubber in the tropics.

"No," he said; "a deal of that kind is out of my line. Why not sell them through a broker and get your full profit?"

"It would take some days," answered the other.

"Besides, they won't move up until the directors let things out at the next meeting. Something of that kind, anyway; I forget — Batley explained it." He paused and added irritably: "Believe I told you I'm in a hole."

"You must meet your losses and don't know how to manage it?"

Lisle was curious and had no diffidence about putting the question, though the lad was obviously off his guard.

"I can raise the money right enough — Batley'll see to that; but I'd sooner do it another way. The interest's high enough to make one think, and in this case I'm paying it on money he's putting into his pocket."

There was a good deal to be inferred from this reply, but Lisle considered before he spoke again.

"You're twenty-one, aren't you?" he asked.

"Yes," assented the lad, "but the trustees keep hold until I'm twenty-four."

He turned with quick suspicion to the Canadian.

"I don't see what that has to do with you!"

"It isn't very obvious," Lisle agreed. "Shall we go in?"

They found Bella in the hall, and when her brother went to get his coat she walked out on to the terrace with Lisle.

"Thank you," she said gratefully when they were out of sight from the hall. "It was a relief to see you had succeeded in getting him away."

"I'm sorry I was unable to do so sooner," Lisle replied.

"Ah! Then he has been losing heavily again?"

"I'm afraid so. I couldn't make my interference too marked." Obeying some impulse, he laid his hand on her arm. "Rather a handful for you, isn't he?"

Bella nodded, making no attempt to shake off his grasp.

"Yes," she acknowledged with some bitterness; "but I can hardly complain that I have no control over him. It would be astonishing if I had." She broke into a little harsh laugh. "Anyway, I manage to keep my head, and do not deceive myself, as he does. I know what our welcome's worth and what the few people whose opinion counts for anything think of us."

"Well," offered Lisle, "if I can be of service in any respect —"

"Thanks," she interrupted, and turned back toward the door.

When they reached the hall she glanced at her companion as the light fell on his face.

"Your offer's genuine," she said impulsively. "I can't see what you expect in return."

Lisle was puzzled by her expression. She was variable in her moods, generally somewhat daring, and addicted to light mockery. He could not tell whether she spoke in bitterness or in mischief.

"No," he replied gravely, "nor do I."

She left him with a laugh; and a little later he drove her and her companions away and afterward returned to Nasmyth's house to find that his host had retired. Lisle followed his example and rising early the next morning they set off for the river, up which the sea-trout were running. They were busy all morning and it was not until noon, when they lay in the sunshine

eating their lunch on a bank of gravel, that either of them made any allusion to the previous evening.

"Did you enjoy yourself last night?" Nasmyth asked.

"Fairly," Lisle responded, smiling. "I've already confessed that you people interest me. At the same time, I had my difficulties — first of all to explain to the Marples why you didn't come. The reasons you gave didn't sound convincing."

"They were good enough. It's probable that Marple understood them. Like most of my neighbors, I go once or twice in a year; his subscription to the otter hounds entitles him to that."

"We don't look at things in that way in the parts of Canada I'm acquainted with," laughed Lisle.

"Then I've no doubt you'll come to it," Nasmyth replied with some dryness. "They've done so already in the older cities. Now — since you're fond of candor — you have been glad to earn a dollar or two a day by chopping and shoveling, haven't you? Have you felt left out in the cold at all during the little while you have spent among us?"

"Not in the least," Lisle owned.

"Then you can infer what you like from that. In this country, we take a good deal for granted and avoid explanations. But you haven't said anything about the proceedings at Marple's. I suppose you were invited to take a hand at cards?"

"I invited myself; result, sixty dollars to the bad in half an hour. I used to hold my own in our mining camps, and I hadn't the worst cards."

Nasmyth laughed with unconcealed enjoyment.

"The only fault I have to find with you Westerners

is that you're rather apt to overrate yourselves. I suppose they let young Crestwick in a good deal deeper?"

"That," laughed Lisle, "is what you have been leading up to from the beginning."

"I'll admit it. As I've hinted, one of the differences between an American and an Englishman is that the former usually expresses more or less forcibly what he thinks, unless, of course, he's a financier or a politician; while you have often to learn by experience what the latter means. Better use your own methods in telling me what took place."

Lisle did so, omitting any reference to Bella, and Nasmyth looked disturbed and disgusted.

"Crestwick's as devoid of sense as he is of manners; he deserves to lose. What I can't get over is that fellow Batley's staying in what was once George Gladwyne's house, with Clarence standing sponsor for him."

Lisle fancied he could understand. Nasmyth had his failings, but he had also his simple, drastic code, and it was repugnant to him that a man of his own caste, one of a family he had long known and respected, should countenance an outsider of Batley's kind and assist him in fleecing a silly vicious lad.

"You have no reason to think well of Gladwyne," Lisle reminded him.

"I haven't," Nasmyth owned. "Still, though the man has made one very bad break, I hardly expected him to exceed every limit. At present it looks as if he might do so; he'll probably be forced to."

"I don't quite understand."

"Then I'll have to explain. It's unpleasant, but

here the thing is, as I see it — Batley's not the kind of man Clarence would willingly associate with, and to give Clarence his dues, all his instinct must make him recoil from the fellow's game with Crestwick. Considering that he's apparently making no protest against it, this is proof to me that Batley has some pretty firm hold on him."

"What's Batley's profession?"

"I suspect he's something in the smart money-lending line; one of the fellows who deal with minors and others on post-obits."

"Post-obits?"

"Promises to pay after somebody's dead. Suppose there should be only an invalid or an old man between you and a valuable property; you could borrow on the strength of your expectations. Now, what Crestwick told you shows that the person who left him his money very wisely handed it to trustees, with instructions to pay him only an allowance until he's twenty-four. It's a somewhat similar case to the one I've instanced — he's drawing on a capital he can't get possession of for two or three years, and no doubt paying an extortionate interest. So far as I know, no respectable bank or finance broker would handle that kind of business."

"But if the boy died before he succeeded to the property?"

"Batley could cover the risk by making Crestwick take out an insurance policy in his favor."

Lisle's face grew stern, and Nasmyth lay smoking in silence for a while. Then he broke out again:

"It's intolerable! George Gladwyne's successor abetting that fellow in robbing the lad, luring him into wagers and reckless play, with the result that most of

the borrowed money goes straight back into the hands of the man who lent it!"

"Have you any suspicion that Gladwyne gets a share?"

"No," replied Nasmyth, with signs of strong uneasiness; "I can't believe he benefits in that manner — if he did, I'd feel it my duty to denounce him. Still, I expect he wins a little now and then, incidentally."

Again there was silence for a while, broken finally by Lisle.

"When I'd been here a week or two I began to see that my task wasn't quite so simple as it had appeared — you can't attack a man situated as Gladwyne is without hurting innocent people. Indeed, I've spent hours wondering how, when the time comes, I can clear Vernon's memory, with the least possible damage — that is my business, not the punishing of Gladwyne, though he deserves no consideration. As you say, a man may make a bad break and pull up again, but this one has had his chance and has gone in deeper. What he's doing now — helping to ruin that lad in cold-blood — is almost worse than the other offense."

Nasmyth made an acquiescent gesture.

"It's true; let it go at that. I don't see how the thing can be stopped. There's a fish rising in the slack yonder!"

Lisle saw a silvery gleam in a strip of less-troubled water behind a boulder and taking up his rod he cast the gaudy fly across the ripple. There was a jar, a musical clinking of the reel, and when Nasmyth waded in with ready net all thought of Gladwyne passed out of the Canadian's mind.

After a few minutes' keen excitement, they landed

the beautiful glistening trout; and then they set off down-stream in search of another, scrambling over rock and gravel and wading amidst the froth in the pools. Overhead, soft gray clouds drifted by, casting long shadows across fern-clad hillside and far-reaching moor; and the flood flashed into silver gleams and grew dim again.

Both of the men were well content with their surroundings, and now and then Nasmyth wondered why Clarence could not be satisfied with the simple pleasures that were freely offered him. He could have had the esteem of his neighbors and the good will of his tenants, and there were healthful tasks that would have kept him occupied — the care of his estate, the improving of the homes and conditions of life of those who worked for him, experiments in stock-raising, local public duties. He had once slipped badly, so badly that the offense could hardly be contemplated; but that was when he was weak and famishing and under the influence of an overwhelming fear. At least, he could make some reparation by leaving the countryside better than he found it, and in this he had friends who would loyally assist him.

Clarence, however, had chosen another way, one that led down-hill to further dishonor; and Nasmyth considered gloomily what the end of it all would be. Occasionally he glanced at the lithe figure of the Canadian, standing knee-deep amid the froth of the stream. Serious-eyed, alert, resolute, he could be depended on to carry out any purpose he had determined on; it was his firm hands that would hold Clarence's scourge.

CHAPTER XII

MRS. GLADWYNE'S APPEAL

MILLICENT was sitting in a window-seat with a paint-box beside her and a drawing of a water-ouzel upon her knee. It was a lifelike sketch, but she had a great capacity for painstaking and she was not altogether pleased with the drawing. The bird stood on a stone an inch or two above a stream, its white breast harmonizing with the flecks of snowy froth, and the rest of its rather somber plumage of the same hue as a neighboring patch of shadow. This was as it should be, except that, as the central object of a picture, it was too inconspicuous. She was absorbed in contemplating it when Mrs. Gladwyne was shown in. Clarence's mother did not pay many visits and Millicent fancied she had some particular object in coming.

She sat down where the sunlight fell on her gentle face and silvery hair, her delicate white hands spread out on her dark dress.

"Busy, as usual, my dear," she said, glancing at the sketch. "That's very pretty."

"I think it's correct," returned Millicent; "but I'm not sure it's what it ought to be in other respects. You see, its purpose is to show people what a water-ouzel is like and it's hard to make the creature out. Of course, I could have drawn it against a background

that would have forced up every line, but that wouldn't have been right — these wild things were made to fade into their surroundings." She laughed. "Truth is rigid and uncompromising — it's difficult to make it subservient to expediency."

Her visitor did not feel inclined to discuss the matter.

"You're too fastidious," she smiled, and added with a sigh: "George was like that. Little things keep cropping up every day to show it — I mean in connection with his care of the property. I'm sometimes afraid that Clarence is different."

Millicent could not deny this, but she did not see his mother's purpose in confessing it.

"Of course," she answered, as she rang for tea, "he hasn't been in charge very long. One can learn only by experience."

Mrs. Gladwyne looked grateful; but although she was very tranquil there was something in her manner that hinted at uncertainty.

"You will finish the book and these pictures some day," she said. "What will you do then?"

"I really don't know. Perhaps I shall start another. If not, there is always something I can turn my hand to. So many things seem to need doing — village matters alone would find me some occupation."

The elder lady considered this.

"Yes," she agreed with diffidence. "I'm now and then afraid everything's not quite so satisfactory as it used to be. The cottages don't look so pretty or well cared for, the people are not so content — some of them are even inclined to be bitter and resentful. Of course, things change, our relations with our depen-

dents among them; but I feel that people like the Marples, living as they do, have a bad effect. They form a text for the dissatisfied."

Millicent contented herself with a nod. She could not explain that in spite of the changing mode of thought it is still possible for an old-fashioned landlord to retain almost everybody's good will. Sympathy and tactful advice are appreciated, though not effusively, and even a bluff, well-meant reproof is seldom resented. But when rents are rigorously exacted by a solicitor's or banker's clerk, and repairs are cut down, when indifference takes the place of judicious interest, it is hardly logical to look for the cordial relations that might exist. Nasmyth's tenants stopped and exchanged a cheery greeting or a jest with him; most of Gladwyne's looked grim when he or his friends, the Marples, passed.

Then tea was brought in and Millicent found pleasure in watching her guest. Mrs. Gladwyne made a picture, she thought, sitting with the dainty china in her beautiful hands; she possessed the grace and something of the stateliness which is associated with the old régime.

"How quick your people are," she commented. "You rang and the things were brought in. Our staff is large and expensive, but as a rule they keep us waiting. Though you paint and go out so much, you have the gift of making a home comfortable. It really is a gift; one that should not be wasted."

Millicent grew serious. It looked as if her companion were coming to the point, and this became plainer when Mrs. Gladwyne proceeded.

"Do you think the life you contemplate — writing

books on birds and animals — is the best or most natural one for a woman? "

A little color crept into the girl's face.

" I don't know; perhaps it isn't. It is the one that seems open to me."

" The only one, my dear? You must know what I mean."

Millicent turned and faced her. She was disturbed, but she seldom avoided a plain issue.

" I think," she said, " it would be better if you told me."

" It's difficult." Mrs. Gladwyne hesitated. " You must forgive me if I go wrong. Still, you know it was always expected that you would marry Clarence some day. It would be so desirable."

" For which of us? " Millicent's tone was sharp. She sympathized with Mrs. Gladwyne, but something was due to herself.

" It was Clarence that I was thinking of," admitted her visitor. " I suppose that I am selfish; but I am his mother." She laid down her cup and looked at the girl with pleading eyes. " I must go on, though I don't think I could say what I wish to any one but you. Clarence has many good qualities, but he needs guidance. An affectionate son; but it is my misfortune that I am not wise or firm enough to advise or restrain him. I have dropped behind the new generation; the standards are different from what they were when I was young."

This was true, but it was incomplete, and Millicent let her finish.

" I have been a little anxious, perhaps foolishly so, about him now and then. I cannot approve of all his

friends — sometimes they jar on me — and I do not like the views he seems to have acquired from them. They are not the ones his father held. Of course, this is only the result of wrong associations and of having a good-humored, careless nature; it would be so different if he could be brought under some wholesome influence." She smiled at Millicent. "One could trust implicitly to yours."

It was an old plea, fallacious often, but none the less effective. Millicent was devoid of officious self-righteousness, but she was endowed with a compassionate tenderness which prompted her to extend help to all who needed it. She thought that Clarence did so, but in spite of that she did not feel so responsive as she could have wished.

"There is one difficulty," she answered while the blood crept into her face. "I'll own that I recognized what your ideas and George's were about Clarence and myself. I may go so far. But of late there has been nothing to show that Clarence desired to carry out those ideas."

Mrs. Gladwyne gathered her courage.

"My dear, it is rather hard to say, but the truth is that a declaration from a man is not usually quite spontaneous. He looks for some tacit encouragement, a sign that one is not altogether indifferent to him. Now it has struck me that during the past year you have rather stood aloof from my son."

Millicent started slightly; there was some truth in this statement. Mrs. Gladwyne, however, was not wise enough to stop.

"I think that is why there is some risk of his falling into bad hands — that Crestwick girl isn't diffident,"

she went on. "I know the strong regard he has for you; but the girl sees a good deal of him, and a man is sometimes easily led where he does not mean to go."

Millicent's cheeks burned.

"Do you wish me to compete openly for Clarence's favor with Bella Crestwick?"

Mrs. Gladwyne spread out her hands in protest.

"Oh, my dear!" she exclaimed. "I have said the wrong thing. I warned you that you might have to forgive me."

"But the thought must have been in your mind!"

"I only meant that you needn't repel or avoid him, as you have done of late."

Millicent felt compassionate. After all, Mrs. Gladwyne was pleading for what she believed would benefit her only son; but the girl was very human and a trace of her resentment remained. It was, however, obvious that Mrs. Gladwyne expected some response.

"I can venture to promise that I won't be openly rude," Millicent agreed with a faint smile.

"Can't you go a little beyond that, my dear?"

The girl, seeing the look in her eyes, yielded to an impulse which prompted her to candor.

"What there is to be said had better be spoken now," she replied. "I have confessed that I knew what was expected — Clarence showed that he knew it, too — and the idea was not altogether repugnant to me. But since he came back from Canada there has been a change in both of us. How or why I can't explain, but we have drifted apart. I don't know whether this will go on — I don't understand myself — I only know that I am as anxious for his welfare as

I always have been. It must be left to him; there is nothing you must urge me to do."

Mrs. Gladwyne looked regretful, but she made a sign of acquiescence and rising came toward the girl and took her hand.

"What I could do I have done — badly perhaps," she said. "I can't blame you. I am only sorry."

She went out in a few minutes and left Millicent in a thoughtful mood. Looking back on the past, the girl recognized that she had been fond of Clarence — which was the best word for it — and that she would have married him had he urged it. He had, however, hardly been in a position to do so then, and she remembered that she had in no way regretted the fact. This was, she thought, significant. Then the change had gradually come about. She saw his faults more clearly and it grew increasingly difficult to believe that she could eradicate them. What was more, during the past few weeks she had once or twice felt scornfully angry with him. She had tried not to yield to the sensation, and now she wondered how it had originated and why she was less tolerant.

As she considered the question, a shadow fell upon the sunlit lawn and looking up she saw Lisle approaching with a creel upon his back. She started at the sight of him and once more felt her cheeks grow hot; then she smiled, for the half-formed suspicion that had flashed into her mind was obviously absurd. He saw her the next moment and strode toward the open window.

"We got a few good white trout, fresh run," he said. "It occurred to me that you might like one or two of them."

He glanced at the long French window.

"May I come in this way?"

"I've no doubt you could do so, but out of deference to conventional prejudices it might be better if you went round by the usual entrance."

"Charmed!" he smiled. "That's easy."

"Would you rather have it hard?"

"That wasn't the idea," he answered. "I only felt that a much greater difficulty wouldn't stop my getting in."

Millicent laughed.

"If one of my neighbors made such speeches, they'd sound cheap. From you they're amusing."

He affected to consider this.

"I suppose the difference is that I mean them. Anyway, I'll walk around."

She gave him some tea when he came in, and afterward admired the fish.

"They're well above the average weight," she said.

"We had two or three that would beat them," Lisle declared. "Miss Crestwick came along and corralled the finest."

"Was the explanation essential?" Millicent inquired with a smile.

"That was a bad break of mine. So bad that I won't try to explain it away."

"I think you are wise," Millicent retorted with a trace of dryness.

On the face of it, she was pleased with his answer, but the fact he had mentioned caused her some irritation. Bella Crestwick, not content with monopolizing Clarence, must also seek to include the Canadian in her train. It was curious that for the moment that

seemed the more serious offense. The girl was insatiable and going too far, Millicent thought.

Lisle noticed her silence.

"Remember that I'm from the wilds," he said.

She smiled at him reassuringly.

"After all, that isn't a great drawback. Anyway, I'm grateful for the trout." Then, somewhat to his surprise, she abruptly changed the subject. "I wonder what you think of a tacit promise?"

His face grew thoughtful; she liked his quick change to seriousness.

"Well, I don't know that my opinion's of much value, but you may have it. Supposing two people allow each other to assume that they're agreed upon the same thing, it's binding upon both of them."

"But if only one actually made his wishes clear."

"In that case, the other had the option of showing that they couldn't be acceded to. Failing that, in my view, he can't go back on it." Then his eyes gleamed with amusement. "I don't often set up as a philosopher."

Millicent was a little vexed with herself for asking him and did not quite understand why she had done so, unless it was because she had not altogether recovered her usual collectedness after Mrs. Gladwyne's visit. Why she should be interested in this man's opinion was not clear, but she thought he was one who would act in accordance with it. She was afterward even more astonished at her next remark, which she made impulsively.

"You have seen a good deal of Miss Crestwick, one way or another."

He considered this gravely.

"Yes," he replied. "I like her. For one thing, she's genuinely concerned about that brother of hers."

"What do you think of him?"

"Not much," Lisle answered candidly. "I've no use for a man who needs a woman to keep him straight and look after him. But one feels a strong respect for the woman, even though it's obvious that she's wasting her time."

"Is it wasting time?"

"It strikes me like that. A man of that sort is bound to come down badly some day."

Millicent sat silent a while. The conversation had taken an unusually serious turn, but she wondered whether he were right. She had, she thought, allowed Clarence to assume that she would not repulse him when he formally claimed her and that — so this man from the wilds considered — constituted a binding obligation. She could not contest this view; but Clarence seemed more interested in Bella Crestwick than he was in her. Then she wondered why the girl had made so much of Lisle, unless it was to use him for the purpose of drawing Clarence on. If that were so, it seemed a pity that the confiding Canadian could not be warned, though that, of course, was out of the question.

"I'm afraid I'm not very amusing to-day," she acknowledged.

He smiled.

"I'll go the moment you want to get rid of me; but, even if you don't say anything, I like sitting here. This place rests me."

"I shouldn't have imagined you to be of a very restful nature."

"Oh," he declared, "there's a kind of quietness that braces you."

He was less reserved than the average Englishman, but he felt the charm of his surroundings more keenly than the latter would probably have done. Everything in the room was artistic, but its effect was deeper than mere prettiness. It was cool, though the autumn sunshine streamed in, and the girl had somehow impressed her personality upon it. Soft colorings, furniture, even the rather incongruous mixture of statuettes and ivory carvings, blended into a harmonious whole, and the girl made a most satisfactory central figure, as she sat opposite him in her unusually thoughtful mood. He felt the charm of her presence, though he could hardly have analyzed it. As he said, it was not even needful that she should talk to him.

"There are lakes in British Columbia from which you can look straight up at the never-melting snows," he went on. "You feel that you could sit there for hours, without wanting to move or speak, though it must be owned that one very seldom gets the opportunity."

"Why?" Millicent inquired.

"As a rule, the people who visit such places are kept too busy chopping big trees, hauling canoes round rapids, or handling heavy rocks. Besides, you have your food to cook and your clothes to mend and wash."

"Then, after the day's labor, a man must do his own domestic work?"

"Of course," answered Lisle. "Now and then one comes back to camp too wet or played out to worry, and goes to sleep without getting supper. I'm speak-

ing of when you're working for your own hand. In a big logging or construction camp you reach the fringe of cooperation. This man sticks to the saw, the other to the ax, somebody else who gets his share of the proceeds chops the cord-wood and does the cooking."

"And if you can neither chop nor saw nor cook?"

"Then," Lisle informed her dryly, "you have to pull out pretty quick."

"It sounds severe; that's cooperation in its grimmest aspect, though it's quite logical — everybody must do his part. I'm afraid I shouldn't be justified if we adopted it here."

"Cooperation implies a division of tasks," Lisle pointed out. "In a country like this, they're many and varied. So long as you draw the wild things as you do, you'll discharge your debt."

"Do you know that that's the kind of work the community generally pays one very little for?"

"Then it shows its wrong-headedness," Lisle answered as he glanced meaningly round the room. "But haven't you got part of your fee already? Of course, that's impertinent."

"I believe we would shrink from saying it, but it's quite correct," Millicent replied. "Still, since you have mentioned the drawings, I'd like your opinion about this ouzel."

She took up the sketch and explained the difficulty, as she had done to Mrs. Gladwyne.

"It's right; don't alter it," advised Lisle. "It's your business to show people the real thing as it actually is, so they can learn, not to alter it to suit their untrained views."

He laughed and rose somewhat reluctantly.

"After that, I'd better get along. I have to thank you for allowing me to come in."

She let him go with a friendly smile, and then sat down to think about him. He was rather direct, but the good-humor with which he stated his opinions softened their positiveness. Besides, she had invited them; and she felt that they were correct. He was such another as Nasmyth, simple in some respects, but reliable; one who could never be guilty of anything mean. She liked the type in general, and she admitted that she liked this representative of it in particular.

CHAPTER XIII

A FUTILE PROTEST

IT was late at night, but Gladwyne sat, cigar in hand, in his library, while Batley lounged beside the hearth. A wood fire diffused a faint aromatic fragrance into the great high-ceilinged room, and the light of a single silver lamp flickered on the polished floor, which ran back like a sheet of black ice into the shadow. Heavily-corniced bookcases rose above it on either band, conveying an idea of space and distance by the way they grew dimmer as they receded from the light.

The room had an air of stateliness in its severe simplicity, and its owner, sitting just inside the ring of brightness, clad in conventional black and white, looked in harmony with it. Something in his finely-lined figure and cleanly-molded face stamped him as one at home in such a place. A decanter stood near his elbow, but it was almost full. Gladwyne, in many ways, was more of an ascetic than a sensualist, though this was less the result of moral convictions than of a fastidious temperament. The man had an instinctive aversion for anything that was ugly or unpleasant. His companion, dressed with an equal precision, looked different, more virile, coarser; he was fuller in figure and heavier in face.

"No," declared Gladwyne with a show of firmness;

"the line must be drawn. I've already gone farther than I should have done."

"I'm sorry for you, Gladwyne — you don't seem to realize that a man can't very well play two widely different parts at once," Batley rejoined, smiling. "Your interfering Canadian friend would describe your attitude as sitting upon the fence. It's an uncomfortable position, one that's not often tenable for any length of time. Hadn't you better make up your mind as to which side you'll get down on?"

Gladwyne looked uneasy. The choice all his instinct prompted him to make was not open to him, except at a cost which he was hardly prepared to face. He was known as a bold rider, he had the steady nerves that usually result from a life spent in the open air, but, as Batley recognized, he lacked stamina.

"You are going wide of the mark," he answered. "What I have asked you to do is to let the lad alone. The thing's exciting comment. You"— he hesitated —"have made enough out of him."

"I think," replied the other coolly, "I was very much to the point. If you don't recognize this, I'll ask: Suppose I don't fall in with your request, what then?"

Gladwyne examined his cigar. It was not in his nature to face an issue boldly, and his companion seemed determined to force one.

"I've asked it as a favor," he finally said.

"No," corrected Batley; "I don't think you did so. You intimated your wishes in a rather lordly style."

This was true, but Gladwyne winced at the man's cold smile. He had, in a fit of indignation which was both honest and commendable, expressed himself with

some haughtiness; but he knew that he would be beaten if it came to an open fight. This was unfortunate, because his intentions were good.

"Besides," Batley continued, "I'm not in a position to grant expensive favors. My acquaintance with young Crestwick is, of course, profitable. What's more, I've very liberally offered you a share."

Gladwyne's face grew hot. He had acted, most reluctantly, as a decoy to the vicious lad, but he had never benefited by it, except when now and then some stake fell into his hands. The suggestion that he should share in the plunder filled him with disgust, and he knew that Batley had made it to humiliate him.

"You're taking risks," he continued. "There's legislation on the subject of minors' debts; Crestwick began to deal with you before he was twenty-one, and he's still in his trustees' hands. If he made trouble, I'm inclined to think some of your transactions would look very much like conspiracy."

"I know my man. You people would suffer a good deal, sooner than advertise yourselves through the law courts."

"Crestwick isn't one of us," Gladwyne objected.

"Then, as he aspires to be considered one, he'll go even farther than you would. None are so keen for the honor of the flock as those who don't strictly belong to the fold. There's another point you overlook — a person can't very well conspire alone, and inquiries might be made about my confederates. That, however, is not a matter of much importance, because I imagine Miss Crestwick would not allow any one to point to you. Besides, her money's safe, and she's a prepossessing young lady."

Gladwyne straightened himself sharply in his chair. "Don't go too far! There are things I won't stand!"

"Then we'll try to avoid them. All I require is that you still give the lad the entry of this house and don't interfere with me. You see I'm reasonable."

As Gladwyne had interfered, to acquiesce was to own defeat, which was galling, and while he hesitated Batley watched him with an air of indulgent amusement.

"It's a pity you were not quite straight with me at the beginning, Gladwyne; it would have saved you trouble," he remarked at length. "I took a sporting risk at pretty long odds — I have to do so now and then and I pay up when I lose. But if I'd known the money was to go to Miss Gladwyne and you would only get the land, I'd never have kept you supplied; and in particular I wouldn't have made the last big loan shortly before you and your cousin sailed for Canada."

"You knew it was a blind speculation — that I ran the same risk as George did, and that he might outlive me."

"You're wrong on one point," Batley objected dryly. "I'm acquainted with your temperament — it's not one that would lead you into avoidable difficulties. Well, you came through and your cousin died, but you failed to pay me off when you came into possession."

"I've explained that I couldn't foresee the trouble I have in meeting expenses. I've paid you an extortionate interest."

"That's in arrears," retorted Batley. "You should have pinched and denied yourself to the utmost until you had got rid of me. You couldn't bring your-

self to do so — well, it's rather a pity one can't have everything."

Approaching the table, he quietly took up the lamp. It was heavy, standing on a massive silver pillar, but he raised it above his head so that the light streamed far about the stately room. Then he laughed as he set it down.

"It's something to be the owner of such a place and enjoy all that it implies — which includes your acknowledged status and your neighbors' respect. There would be a risk of losing the latter if it came out that, driven by financial strain, you had been speculating on your cousin's death."

Gladwyne made a little abrupt movement and Batley saw that his shot had told.

"It would be enough to place you under a cloud," he went on. "People might think that you had at least not been very reluctant to leave him to starve. Well, I've had to wait for my money, with the interest by no means regularly paid, and unless you can square off the account, I must ask you to leave me a free hand to deal with Crestwick as I think fit. In return, if it's needful, I'll see you through on reasonable terms until you marry Miss Crestwick or somebody else with money."

On the whole, Gladwyne was conscious of relief. He had been badly frightened for a moment or two. If Batley, who had good reasons for distrusting him, had accepted his account of his cousin's death, it was most unlikely that it had excited suspicion in the mind of anybody else. Crestwick, however, must be left to his fate. It was, though he failed to recognize this, an eventful decision that Gladwyne made.

"As you will," he answered, rising. "It's late; I'm going for my candle."

He strode out of the room, and Batley smiled as he followed him.

A day or two later Lisle stood on Gladwyne's lawn. Gladwyne entertained freely, and though his neighbors did not approve of all of his friends, the man had the gift of pleasing, and his mother unconsciously exerted a charm on every one. She rarely said anything witty, but she never said anything unkind and she would listen with a ready sympathy that sometimes concealed a lack of comprehension.

Lisle had a strong respect for the calm, gracious lady, though she had won it by no more than a smile or two and a few pleasant words, and he went over to call upon her every now and then. He was interested in the company he met at her house; it struck him as worth studying; and he had a curious feeling that he was looking on at the preliminary stages of a drama in which he might presently be called upon to play a leading part. Besides, he had reasons for watching Gladwyne.

The stage was an attractive one to a man who had spent much of his time in the wilderness — a wide sweep of sunlit sward with the tennis nets stretched across part of it; on one side a dark fir wood; and for a background a stretch of brown moor receding into the distance, dimmed by an ethereal haze. A group of young men and women, picturesquely clad, were busy about the nets; others in flannels and light draperies strolled here and there across the grass, and a few more had gathered about the tea-table under a spreading cedar, where Mrs. Gladwyne sat in a low wicker-

chair. Over all there throbbed the low, persistent murmur of a stream.

Lisle was talking to Millicent near the table. He looked up as a burst of laughter rose from beside the nets and saw Bella Crestwick walk away from them. One or two of the others stood looking after her, and Mrs. Gladwyne glanced from her chair inquiringly.

"They seem amused," she said.

"It was probably at one of Miss Crestwick's remarks; she's undoubtedly original," returned Millicent. "Still, I think it was chiefly Mr. Marple's laugh you heard."

His voice had been most in evidence — it usually carried far — but Lisle was half amused at the disapproval in the girl's tone.

"I'm afraid I'm now and then a little boisterous, too," he ventured.

"It depends a good deal upon what you laugh at," Millicent informed him.

Mrs. Gladwyne looked up again, as if she had not heard, and the girl smiled at her.

"What I said isn't worth repeating."

She moved away a pace or two and Lisle watched Bella, who glanced once or twice in his direction as she crossed the lawn. Somehow he felt that he was wanted and a little later he strolled after the girl. Millicent noticed it with a slight frown, though she did not trouble to ask herself why she was vexed. When Lisle reached Bella, she regarded him with mischief in her eyes.

"As I once mentioned, you learn rapidly," she laughed. "You'll be thankful for the instruction some day, and I promise not to teach you anything

very detrimental. But I'm a little surprised that Millicent Gladwyne allowed you to come."

"I dare say she could spare me; I'm not a very entertaining companion," Lisle said humbly.

"It wasn't that," Bella explained. "I don't think she'd like you spoiled — perhaps I should say contaminated; she has ideas on the subject of education, too. She always calls me Miss Crestwick, which is significant; I've no doubt she did so when Marple made himself conspicuous by his amusement just now."

Lisle had noticed the correctness of her assumptions on other occasions, but he said nothing, for he had noticed some bitterness in her voice. He walked on with her and she led him into a path through a shrubbery bordering the lawn, where she sat down on a wooden seat.

"Now," she said teasingly, "we have given the others something to think about; but I've really no designs on you. It wouldn't be much use, anyway. You're safe."

She looked up at him with elfish mischief in her aggressively pretty face. Dressed in some clinging fabric of pale watery green that matched the greenish light in her eyes and the reddish gleam in her hair, she was very alluring; but it was borne in upon Lisle that to take up her challenge too boldly would lower him in the girl's regard.

"I'm human," he laughed. "Perhaps I'd better mention it. But I think it's more to the purpose to say that I'm altogether at your disposal."

"Well," she answered, "I wanted you. As you're almost a stranger, it's curious, isn't it? But, you see, I haven't a real friend in the world."

"I wonder if that can be quite correct?"

"So far as the people here go, haven't you eyes?"

Lisle had seen the men gather about her, but it was those he thought least of who followed her most closely, and the women stood aloof.

"There are Miss Marple and her mother, anyway; they're friends of yours," he pointed out.

"Just so. Flo and I are in the same class, making the same fight; but that isn't always a reason for mutual appreciation or support. Mrs. Marple, of course, is her daughter's partizan, though in some ways it suits us to stand together. But I didn't bring you here to listen to my grievances, but because you happen to be the one man I can trust."

Lisle looked embarrassed, but merely bent his head.

"It's that silly brother of mine again," she went on.

"What has he been doing now?"

"It's what he's thinking of doing that's the worst. He has been led to believe it's easy to acquire riches on the stock exchange and that he has the makings of a successful speculator in him. Cards and the turf I've had to tolerate — after all, there were ways in which he got some return for what he spent on them — but this last craze may be disastrous."

"Where did he get the idea that he's a financial genius? It wouldn't be from you."

"No," she said seriously; "I'm his sister and most unlikely to encourage him in such delusions. I don't think Batley had much trouble in putting the notion into his mind." Her expression suddenly changed. "How I hate that man!"

Lisle looked down at her with grave sympathy.

"It's quite easy to get into difficulties by specu-

lating, unless one has ample means. But I understood —"

Bella checked him with a gesture.

"Jim comes into money — we have a good allowance now — but it will be nearly two years before he gets possession. I want him to start fair when he may, perhaps, have learned a little sense, and not to find himself burdened with debts and associates he can't get rid of. At present, Batley's lending him money at exorbitant interest. I've pleaded, I've stormed and told him plain truths; but it isn't the least use."

"I see. Why don't you take him away?"

"He won't come. It would be worse if I left him."

"Do you know why Gladwyne tolerates Batley?"

"I don't." Bella looked up sharply. "What has that to do with it?"

Lisle thought it had a bearing on the matter, as the lad would have seen less of Batley without Gladwyne's connivance.

"Well," he countered, "what would you like me to do?"

"It's difficult to answer. He's obstinate and resents advice. You might, however, talk to him when you have a chance; he's beginning to have a respect for your opinions."

"That's gratifying," Lisle commented dryly. "He was inclined to patronize me at first."

She spread out her hands.

"You're too big to mind it! Tell him anything you can about disastrous mining ventures; but don't begin as if you meant to warn him — lead up to the subject casually."

"I'm afraid I'm not very tactful," Lisle confessed. "He'll see what I'm after."

"It's not very likely. Talk as if you considered him a man of experience. It's fortunate that you can be of help in this case, because I think some Canadian mining shares are to be the latest deal. From what Jim said it looks as if Batley was to give him some information about them on Wednesday, when Gladwyne and he are expected at Marple's. Can't you come? I understand you have been asked."

"Yes," promised Lisle. "If I have an opportunity, I'll see what can be done."

Bella rose and smiled at him.

"We'll go back; I'm comforted already. You're not profuse, but one feels that you will keep a promise."

They walked across the lawn, Bella now conversing in an animated strain about unimportant matters, though it did not occur to Lisle that this was for the benefit of the lookers-on. On approaching the tea-table, she adroitly secured possession of a chair which another lady who stood higher in her hostess's esteem was making for, and sitting down chatted cheerfully with Mrs. Gladwyne. Lisle was conscious of some amusement as he watched her. She was clever and her courage appealed to him; but presently he saw Millicent and strolled toward where she was standing. She spoke to him, but he thought she was not quite so gracious as she had been before he went away.

CHAPTER XIV

LISLE COMES TO THE RESCUE

A FEW days after his interview with Bella, Lisle overtook Millicent as she was walking up a wooded dale. She looked around with a smile when he joined her and they fell into friendly talk. There were points on which they differed, but a sense of mutual appreciation was steadily growing stronger between them. Presently Lisle happened to mention the Marples, and Millicent glanced at him thoughtfully. She knew that he met Bella at their house.

"You have seen a good deal of these people, one way or another," she remarked.

"These people? Aren't you a little prejudiced against them?"

"I suppose I am," Millicent confessed.

"Then won't you give me the reason? Your point of view isn't always clear to an outsider."

"I'll try to be lucid. I don't so much object to Marple as I do to what he stands for; I mean to modern tendency."

"That's as involved as ever."

The girl showed a little good-humored impatience. She did not care to supply the explanation — it was against her instincts — and she was inclined to wonder why she should do so merely because the man had asked for it.

"Well," she said, "the feudal system isn't dead, and I believe that what is best in it need never disappear altogether. Of course, it had its drawbacks, but I think it was better than the commercialism that is replacing it. It recognized obligations on both sides, and there is a danger of forgetting them; the new people often fail to realize them at all. Marple — I'm using him as an example — bought the land for what he could get out of it."

"About three per cent., he told me. It isn't a great inducement."

Millicent made a half-disdainful gesture.

"He gets a great deal more — sport, a status, friends and standing, and a means of suitably entertaining them. That, I suppose, is one reason why the return in money from purely agricultural land is so small."

"Then is it wrong for a business man to buy these things, if he can pay for them?"

"Oh, no! But he must take up the duties attached to his purchase. When you buy land, human lives go with it. They're still largely in the landlord's hands. Of course, we have legislation which has curtailed the land-owner's former powers, but it's a soulless, mechanical thing that can never really take the place of direct personal interest."

She stopped and glanced back down the winding dale. Here and there smooth pastures climbed the slopes that shut it in, but over part of them ranged mighty oaks, still almost green. Beyond these, beeches tinted with brown and crimson glowed against the dusky foliage of spruces and silver-firs.

"One needs wisdom, love of the soil and all that

lives on it, and perhaps patience most of all," she resumed. "These woods are an example. They are not natural like your forests — every tree has been carefully planted and as it grew the young sheltering wood about it carefully thinned out. Then as the trunks gained in size it was necessary to choose with care and cut. With the oaks it's a work of generations, planting for one's great-grandchildren, and the point that is suggested most clearly is the continuity of interest that should exist between the men who use the spade and ax and the men who own and plan. It is not a little thing that the third and fourth generations should complete the task, when a mutual toleration and dependence is handed down."

Lisle was conscious of a curious stirring of his feelings as he listened to her. She was tall and finely-proportioned, endowed with a calm and gracious dignity which was nevertheless, he thought, in keeping with a sanguine and virile nature. This girl was one of the fairest and most precious products of the soil she loved.

"It's a pity in many ways that the Gladwyne property didn't come to you," he observed.

Her expression changed and he spread out one hand deprecatingly.

"That's another blunder of mine. I haven't acquired your people's unfailing caution yet, but I only meant —"

"Perhaps it would be better if you didn't tell me what you did mean."

Lisle nodded. He felt that he had deserved the rebuke, as the truth of his assertion could not be admitted without disparaging Gladwyne. She would al-

low nothing to the latter's discredit to be said by a stranger, but it was unpleasant to think that she regarded him as one. He changed the subject.

"You mentioned that landlord and laborer had a joint interest in the soil, and that's undoubtedly right," he said. "The point where trouble arises is, of course, over the division of the yield. The former's share is obvious, but nowadays plowman and forester want more than their fathers seem to have been satisfied with. I don't think you can blame them — in Canada they get more."

"I'll give you an instance to show why one can't treat them very liberally. When my brother got possession he spent a great deal of money — it was left him by his mother and didn't come out of the land — in draining, improvements, and rebuilding homesteads and cottages, besides freely giving his time and care. For a number of years he got no return at all, and part of the expenditure will always be unproductive. It isn't a solitary case."

They went on together through the shadowy, crimson-tinted dale until Millicent stopped at the gate of a field-road.

"I am going to one of the cottages yonder," she explained. "I expect Nasmyth on Wednesday evening. Are you coming with him?"

"I'm sorry, but I'm going to Marple's. You see, I promised."

"Promised Marple?"

He was learning to understand her, for though she showed no marked sign of displeasure he knew that she was not gratified.

"No," he answered; "Miss Crestwick."

She did not speak, but there was something in her manner that hinted at disdainful amusement.

"I think you're hardly fair to her," he said.

"It's possible," Millicent replied carelessly. "Does it matter?"

"Well," he broke out with some warmth, "the girl hasn't such an easy time among you; and one can only respect her for the way she stands by her brother."

"Have you anything to say in his favor?"

"It would be pretty difficult," admitted Lisle. "But you can't blame his sister for that."

"I don't think I've shown any desire to do so," she retorted.

Lisle knit his brows.

"You people are rather curious in your ideas. Now, here's a lonely girl who's pluckily trying to look after that senseless lad, and not a one of you can spare her a word of sympathy, because she doesn't run on the same stereotyped lines as you do. Can you help only the people who will conform?"

Millicent let this pass, and after an indifferent word or two she turned away. Before she reached home, however, she met Nasmyth.

"Why don't you keep Mr. Lisle out of those Marples' hands?" she asked him.

"In the first place, I'm not sure that I could do so; in the second, I don't see why I should try," Nasmyth replied. "On the whole, considering that he's a Western miner, I don't think he's running a serious risk. Perhaps I might hint that Bella Crestwick's hardly likely to consider him as big enough game."

"Don't be coarse!" Millicent paused. "But he spoke hotly in her defense."

"After all," responded Nasmyth, "I shouldn't wonder if she deserves it; but it has no significance. You see, he's a rather chivalrous person."

Millicent flashed a quick glance at him, but his face was expressionless.

"What did he say?" he asked.

"I don't remember exactly: he hinted that we were narrow-minded and uncharitable."

Nasmyth laughed.

"I almost think there's some truth in it. I've seen you a little severe on those outside the fold."

"A man's charity is apt to be influenced by a pretty face," Millicent retorted.

"I'll admit it," replied Nasmyth dryly. "But I can't undertake to determine how far that fact has any bearing on this particular instance."

Millicent talked about something else, but she was annoyed with herself when the question Nasmyth had raised once more obtruded itself on her attention during the evening.

On Wednesday Lisle walked over to Marple's house, because he had promised to go, though he would much rather have spent an hour or two with Nasmyth and Millicent in the latter's drawing-room. He had no opportunity for any private speech with Bella, but she flung him a grateful glance as he came in. He waited patiently and followed her brother here and there, but he could not secure a word with him alone.

Some time had passed when, escaping from a group engaged in what struck him as particularly stupid badinage, he sauntered toward the billiard-room, struggling with a feeling of irritation. He was generally good-humored and tolerant rather than hypercritical,

but the somewhat senseless hilarity of Marple's guests was beginning to jar on him. A burst of laughter which he thought had been provoked by one of Bella's sallies followed him down the corridor, but when he quietly opened the door the billiard-room was empty except for a group of three in one corner. He stopped just inside the threshold, glancing at them, and it was evident that they had not heard his approach.

Wreaths of cigar smoke drifted about the room; the light of the shaded lamps fell upon the men seated on a lounge, and their expressions and attitudes were significant. Gladwyne leaned back languidly graceful; Batley, a burlier figure, was talking, his eyes fixed on Crestwick; and the lad sat upright, looking eager. Batley appeared to be discussing the principles of operating on the stock exchange.

"It's obvious," he said, "that there's very little to be made by waiting until any particular stock becomes a popular favorite — the premium equalizes the profit and sometimes does away with it. The essential thing is to take hold at the beginning, when the shares are more or less in disfavor and can be picked up cheap."

Lisle stood still — he was in the shadow — watching the lad, who now showed signs of uncertainty.

"I dropped a good deal of money the last time I tried it," he protested. "The trouble is that if you come in when the company's starting, you can't form an accurate idea of how it ought to go."

"Exactly," replied Batley. "You can rarely be quite sure. What you need is sound judgment, the sense to recognize a good thing when you see it, pluck, and the sporting instinct — you must be ready to back your opinion and take a risk. It's only the

necessity for that kind of thing which makes it a fine game."

He broke off, looking up, and as Lisle strolled forward with a glance at Crestwick, he saw Batley's genial expression change. It was evident that the idea of being credited with the qualities mentioned appealed to the lad, and Lisle realized that Batley was wishing him far away. He had, however, no intention of withdrawing, and taking out a cigar he chose a cue and awkwardly proceeded to practise a shot.

"This," he said nonchalantly, "is an amusement I never had time to learn, and I really came along for a quiet smoke. Don't let me disturb you."

He saw Crestwick's look and understood what was in the lad's mind. It was incomprehensible to the latter that a man should boldly confess his ignorance of a game of high repute. Batley, however, seeing that the intruder intended to remain, returned to the attack, and though he spoke in a lower voice Lisle caught part of his remarks and decided that he was cleverly playing upon Crestwick's raw belief in himself. This roused the Canadian to indignation, though it was directed against Gladwyne rather than his companion. Batley, he thought, was to some extent an adventurer, one engaged in a hazardous business at which he could not always win, and he had some desirable qualities — good-humor, liberality, coolness and daring. The well-bred gentleman who served as his decoy, however, possessed none of these redeeming characteristics. His part was merely despicable; there was only meanness beneath his polished exterior.

"It certainly looks promising," Lisle heard Crest-

wick say; "you have pretty well convinced me that it can't go wrong."

"I can't see any serious risk," declared Batley. "That, in the case of mining stock, is as far as I'd care to go. On the other hand, there's every prospect of a surprising change in the value of the shares as soon as the results of the first reduction of ore come out. I can only add that I'm a holder and I got you the offer of the shares as a favor from a friend who's behind the scenes. Don't take them unless you feel inclined."

This was a slip, as Lisle recognized. It is not in human nature to dispose of a commodity that will shortly increase in value. Crestwick, however, obviously failed to notice this; Lisle thought the idea of getting on to the inside track appealed to his vanity.

"It's a curious name they've given the mine," commented the lad, repeating it. "What does it mean?"

Lisle started, for he recognized the name, and it offered him a lead. Strolling toward the group, he leaned against the table.

"I can tell you that," he said. "It's an Indian word for a river gorge. I went up it not long ago."

"Then," exclaimed Crestwick, "I suppose you know the mine?"

Lisle glanced at the others. Their eyes were fixed upon him, Batley's steadily, Gladwyne's with a hint of uneasiness. It was, he felt, a remarkable piece of good fortune that had given him control of the situation.

"Yes," he answered carelessly, "I know the mine."

"I'm thinking of taking shares in it," Crestwick informed him.

"Well," said Lisle, "that wouldn't be wise."

Gladwyne leaned farther back in his seat, as if to disassociate himself from the discussion, which was what the Canadian had expected from him; but Batley, who was of more resolute fiber, showed fight. His appearance became aggressive, his face hardened, and there was a snap in his eyes.

"You have made a serious allegation in a rather startling way, Mr. Lisle. As I've an interest in the company in question, I must ask you to explain."

"Then I'd advise you to get rid of your interest as soon as possible; that is, so long as you don't sell out to Crestwick, who's a friend of mine."

Batley's face began to redden, and Lisle, looking around at the sound of a footstep, saw Marple standing a pace or two away. He was a fussy, bustling man, and he raised his hand in expostulation.

"Was that last called for, or quite the thing, Lisle?" he asked.

Batley turned to Gladwyne, as if for support, and the latter assumed his finest air.

"I think there can be only one opinion on that point," he declared.

Lisle's eyes gleamed with an amusement that was stronger than his indignation. That Gladwyne should expect this gravely delivered decision to have any marked effect tickled him.

"Well," he replied, "I'm ready to stand by what I said, and I'll add that if I had any shares I'd give them away to anybody who would register as their owner before the next call is made."

"I understood there wouldn't be a call for a long while," Crestwick broke in.

"Then whoever told you so must have been misinformed," Lisle rejoined.

"Are you casting any doubt upon my honor?" Batley demanded in a bellicose voice.

"I don't think so; anyway, so long as you don't rule out my suggestion. Still, I'm willing to leave Gladwyne to decide the point. He seems to understand these delicate matters."

Marple, looking distressed and irresolute, broke in before Gladwyne had a chance to reply.

"Do you know much about mining, Lisle?"

Lisle laughed.

"I've had opportunities for learning something, as prospector, locator of alluvial claims and holder of an interest in one or two comparatively prosperous companies."

He leaned forward and touched Crestwick's shoulder.

"Come along, Jim, and I'll give you one or two particulars that should decide you."

Somewhat to his astonishment, the lad rose and rather sheepishly followed him. There was an awkward silence for a few moments after they left the room; then Marple turned to his guests.

"I can't undertake to say whether Lisle was justified or not," he began. "I'm sorry, however, that anything of this nature should have happened in my house."

"So am I," said Gladwyne with gracious condescension. "There is, of course, one obvious remedy."

Marple raised his hands in expostulation. He liked Lisle, and Gladwyne was a distinguished guest. Batley seemed to find his confusion amusing.

"I think the only thing we can do is to let the

matter drop," he suggested. "These fellows from the wilds are primitive — one can't expect too much. The correct feeling or delicacy of expression we'd look for among ourselves is hardly in their line."

Marple was mollified, and he fell in with Batley's suggestion that they should try a game.

In the meanwhile, Crestwick looked around at his companion as they went down the corridor.

"I believe I owe you some thanks," he admitted. "I like the way you headed off Batley — I think he meant to turn savage at first — and I wouldn't have been willing to draw in Gladwyne, as you did. He has a way of crushing you with a look."

"It's merely a sign that you deserve it," Lisle laughed. "You take too many things for granted in this country. Test another man's assumption of superiority before you agree with it, and you'll sometimes be astonished to find out what it's really founded on. And now we'd better join those people who're singing."

CHAPTER XV

BELLA'S DEFEAT

THE afternoon was calm and hazy, and Lisle lounged with great content in a basket-chair on Millicent's lawn. His hostess sat near by, looking listless, a somewhat unusual thing for her, and Miss Hume, her elderly companion, genial in spite of her precise formality, was industriously embroidering something not far away. There was not a breath of wind astir; a soft gray sky streaked with long bars of stronger color hung motionless over the wide prospect. Wood and moorland ridge and distant hill had faded to dimness of contour and quiet neutral tones. Indeed, the whole scene seemed steeped in a profound tranquillity, intensified only by the murmur of the river.

Lisle enjoyed it all, though he was conscious that Millicent's presence added to its charm. He had grown to feel restful and curiously at ease in her company. She was, he thought, so essentially natural; one felt at home with her.

"I haven't often seen you with the unoccupied appearance you have just now," he remarked at length.

"I have sent the book off, and after being at work on it so long, I feel disinclined to do anything else," she said. "I've just heard from the publishers; they don't seem enthusiastic. After all, one couldn't ex-

pect that — the style of the thing is rather out of the usual course."

Lisle looked angry and she was pleased with his indignation on her behalf.

"They show precious little sense!" he declared; "but you're right. It's one of your English customs to go on from precedent to precedent until you get an unmodifiable standard, when you slavishly conform to it. Now your book's neither a classification nor a catalogue — it's something far bigger. Never mind what the experts and scientists say; wait until the people who love the wild things and want their story made real get it into their hands!"

His confidence was gratifying, but she changed the subject.

"You Canadians haven't much respect for precedent?"

"No; we try to meet the varying need by constantly changing means. They're often crude, but they're successful, as a rule."

"It's a system that must have a wide effect," she responded, to lead him on. She liked to hear him talk.

"It has. You can see it in the difference between your country and mine. This land's smooth and well trimmed; everything in it has grown up little by little; its mellow ripeness is its charm. Ours is grand or rugged or desolate, but it's never merely pretty. The same applies to our people; they're bubbling over with raw, optimistic vigor, their corners are not rubbed off. Some of them would jar on overcivilized people, but not, I think, on any one with understanding." He spread out his hands. "You have an example; I'm spouting at large again."

"Go on," she begged; "I'm interested. But have you ever thought that instead of being younger than we are you're really older. I mean that you have gone back a long way; begun again at an earlier stage, instead of going ahead?"

"Now you get at the bottom of things!" he exclaimed. "That's always been an idea of mine. The people of the newer countries, perhaps more particularly those to whom I belong, are brought back to the grapple with elemental conditions. We're on the bed-rock of nature."

"Are you too modest to go any further?"

He showed faint signs of confusion and she laughed. "No doubt, the situation makes for pristine vigor, and we are drifting into artificiality," she suggested. "Perhaps you, the toilers, the subduers of the wilderness, are to serve as an anchor for the supercivilized generations to hold on by." She paused and quoted softly: "'Pioneers; O pioneers!'"

"What can I say to that?" he asked with half-amused embarrassment. "We're pretty egotistical, but one can't go back on Whitman."

"No," she laughed mischievously; "I think you're loyal; and there are situations from which it's difficult to extricate oneself. Didn't you find it so, for example, when you declined to come here with Nasmyth, because Miss Crestwick had pressed you to go to Marple's?"

He could think of no neat reply to this and the obvious fact pleased her, for she guessed that he would rather have spent the evening with her. This was true, for now, sitting in the quiet garden in her company, he looked back on the entertainment with

something like disgust. Marple's male friends were, for the most part, characterized by a certain grossness and sensuality; in their amusements at games of chance one or two had displayed an open avarice. These things jarred on the man who had toiled among the rocks and woods, where he had practised a stringent self-denial.

"I heard that you figured in a striking little scene," Millicent went on.

"I couldn't help it." Lisle appeared annoyed. "That man Batley irritated me; though, after all, I don't blame him the most."

This was a slip.

"Whom do you blame?" she asked sharply.

"Oh," he explained, "I wasn't the only person present, and I hadn't arrived at the beginning. Somebody should have stopped the fellow; the shares he tried to work off on Crestwick were no good."

"Then Batley wanted to sell that silly lad some worthless shares — and there were other people looking on?"

He would not tell her that Gladwyne had watched the proceedings, to some extent acquiescing.

"I thought from what you said that you knew all about it," he answered.

"No," she replied, suspecting the truth, but seeing that it would be difficult to extract anything definite from him. "I only heard that you had an encounter of some kind with Batley. But why did you hint that he was not the worst?"

"He was merely acting in accordance with his instincts; one wouldn't expect anything else."

"The implication is that he was tacitly abetted by

people of a different kind who ought to have known better."

He was not to be drawn on this point, and she respected him for it.

"Was it only an animus against Batley that prompted you?" she asked.

"No," he admitted candidly; "I wanted to get young Crestwick out of his clutches. I'm not sure he's worth troubling about, but I'm sorry for his sister. As I've said before, there's something fine in the way she sticks to him."

The chivalrous feeling did him credit, Millicent admitted, but she was dissatisfied with it and was curious to learn if it were the only one he cherished toward the girl.

"That's undoubtedly in her favor," she commented indifferently.

He did not respond and they talked about other matters; but Lisle was now sensible of a slight constraint in Millicent's manner and on the whole she was glad when he took his leave. Quick-witted, as she was, she guessed that he disapproved of the part Clarence had played in the affair at Marple's, and this, chiming with her own suspicions, troubled her. She had a tenderness for Clarence, and she wondered how far her influence might restrain and protect him if, as his mother had suggested, she eventually married him. Another point caused her some uneasiness — Bella Crestwick had boldly entered the field against her and was making use of the Canadian to rouse Clarence by showing him that he had a rival. The thought of it stirred her to indignation; she would not have Lisle treated in that fashion. After sitting

still for half an hour, she rose with a gesture of impatience and went into the house.

On the same evening Bella Crestwick felt impelled to lecture her brother after dinner. That was not a favorable time, for the young man's good opinion of himself was generally strengthened by a glass or two of wine.

"I thought that matter of the shares would have taught you sense, but you must listen to Batley again this afternoon," she scolded. "You were with him for half an hour. I've no patience with you, Jim."

"He's not so easy to shake off, particularly as I'm in his debt," returned the lad. "Besides, he's an interesting fellow, the kind you learn a good deal from. It's an education to mix with such men."

"The trouble is that it's expensive. Come away with me before he ruins you. There's Mrs. Barnard's invitation to their place in Scotland; it would be a good excuse."

Her brother's rather lofty manner changed.

"You're a dear, Bella. You know you don't want to go."

Having a strong reason for wishing to stay, she colored at this. Among his other unprepossessing characteristics, Jim had a trick of saying things he should suppress.

"Never mind me," she answered. "Will you come?"

He had an incomplete recognition of the magnitude of the sacrifice she was ready to make, though it was not this that decided him not to fall in with it.

"No," he said with raw self-confidence. "I'm not

one to run away; but I'll promise to keep my eye on the fellow after this and be cautious. All his schemes aren't in the same class as those mining shares, you know."

Bella lost her temper and told him some plain truths about himself, and this did not improve matters, for in the end she retired, defeated, leaving Jim rather sore but on the whole satisfied with the firmness he had displayed. The girl felt dejected and almost desperate. She could not continually apply to Lisle for assistance, and she shrank from the only other course that seemed open to her; but her affection for the misguided lad impelled her to make another attempt to rescue him, and a few days later she found her opportunity. It was a bold measure she had decided on, one that might cost her a good deal, but she was a young woman of courage and determination.

Mrs. Marple and her daughter drove over with her to call on Mrs. Gladwyne. They found several other people present, and as usual there was no ceremony; the day was fine, and the hostess sat outside, while the guests strolled about the terrace and gardens very much as they liked. Bella, hearing that Clarence was engaged in the library and would not be down for a little while, slipped away in search of him. Her heart beat painfully fast as she went up the wide staircase, but she was outwardly very collected — a slender, attractive figure — when she entered the room. In her dress as well as in her manner Bella was usually distinguished by something unconventional and picturesque. She was not pleased to see Batley standing beside the table at which Gladwyne

sat, but the man gathered up some papers when he noticed her.

"I've explained the thing, Gladwyne, and I expect Miss Crestwick will excuse me," he said.

His manner was good-humored as he bowed to her and though she almost hated the man she was conscious of a faint respect for him. He might have thwarted her by remaining, for she had often made him a butt for her bitter wit. Now, however, when she had shown that his presence was not required, he was gallantly withdrawing. When he went out she sat down and Gladwyne rose and stood with one hand on the mantel, waiting for her to begin. Instead, she glanced round the room, which always impressed her. It was lofty and spacious, the few articles of massive furniture gave it a severe dignity, and there was no doubt that Gladwyne, with his handsome person and highbred air, appeared at home in it.

While she looked around, he was thinking about her. She was provocatively pretty; a fearless, passionate creature, addicted to occasional reckless outbreaks, but nevertheless endowed with a vein of cold and calculating sense. What was as much to the point, she was wealthy, and people were becoming more tolerant toward her; but in the meanwhile he wondered what she wanted.

"I came about Jim," she said at length.

"Well?"

The man's expression, which suddenly changed, was not encouraging and she hesitated.

"You know what he's doing. I've come to ask a favor."

He avoided the issue.

"It's nothing alarming; I don't suppose he's very different from most lads of his age. Perhaps it would be better to let him have his head."

"No," she replied decidedly. "The pace is too hot; I can't hold him. He'll come to grief badly if he's not pulled up. You know that as well as I do!"

Her anger became her, bringing a fine glow to her cheeks and a hint of half-imperious dignity into her pose. It had an effect on him, but he felt somewhat ashamed of himself.

"Well," he asked in a quiet voice, "what's the favor?"

"Shouldn't a sportsman and a man of your kind grant it unconditionally beforehand? Must you be sure you won't get hurt when you make a venture?"

"You'd risk it," he answered, bowing. "You're admirable, Bella. Still, you see, I'm either more cautious or less courageous."

She was badly disappointed. She knew that a good deal depended on his answer to her request, and shrank from making it, because it would prove the strength or weakness of her hold on him. The man attracted her, and she had somewhat openly attempted to capture him. She longed for the position he could give her; she would have married him for that and his house, but she was willing to risk her success for her brother's welfare.

"I want you to tell Batley that he must keep his hands off of Jim," she said.

He started at this.

"He can't do the lad much harm. Aren't you attaching a little too much importance to the matter?"

"No; not in the least," she answered vehemently.

"I've told you so already. But can't you keep to the point? My brother's being ruined in several ways besides the debts he's heaping up; and I've humbled myself to beg your help."

"Was it so very hard?" he asked, and his voice grew soft and caressing.

She was shaken to the verge of yielding. The man was handsome, cultivated, distinguished, she thought. Whether she actually loved him, she did not know, but he could gratify her ambitions and she was strongly drawn to him. He had given her a lead, an opening for a few telling words that might go far toward the accomplishment of her wishes; but, tempted as she was, she would not utter them. She was loyal to the headstrong lad; Jim stood first with her.

"That is beside the point," she said with a becoming air of pride. "I expected you would be willing to do whatever you could. To be refused what I plead for is new to me."

He considered for a moment or two, watching her with keen appreciation. Bella in her present mood, with her affectations cast aside, appealed to him. She was not altogether the woman he would have chosen, but since he must secure a rich wife, there were obvious benefits to be derived from a match with her. He devoutly wished he could accede to her request.

"Well?" she broke out impatiently.

"I'm sorry," he said; "I'm unable to do as you desire. Of course, I wish I could, if only to please you, though I really don't think the thing's necessary."

"You needn't tell me that again! It's a waste of time; I'm not going to discuss it. Face the difficulty,

whatever it is. Do you mean that you can't warn off Batley?"

Gladwyne saw that she would insist on a definite answer and in desperation he told the truth.

"It's out of the question."

It was a shock to her. In a sudden flash of illumination she saw him as he was, weak and irresolute, helpless in the grip of a stronger man. It was significant that she felt no compassion for him, but only disgust and contempt. She was no coward, and even Jim, who could so easily be deluded, was ready enough to fight on due occasion.

"You are afraid of the fellow!" she exclaimed.

Gladwyne colored and moved abruptly. He had imagined that she was his for the asking, but there was no mistaking her cutting scorn.

"Bella," he pleaded, "don't be bitter. You can't understand the difficulties I'm confronted with."

"I can understand too much!" Her voice trembled, but she rose, rather white in face, with an air of decision. "When I came I expected — but after all that doesn't matter — I never expected this!"

He made no answer; the man had some little pride and there was nothing to be said. He had fallen very low even in this girl's estimation and the fact was almost intolerably galling, but he could make no effective defense. She went from him slowly, but with a suggestive deliberation, without looking back, and there was a hint of finality in the way she closed the door.

Once outside, she strove to brace herself, for the interview had tried her hard. She had had to choose between Gladwyne and her brother, but for that she

was now almost thankful. The man she had admired had changed and become contemptible. It was as if he had suddenly collapsed and shriveled before her startled eyes. But that was not all the trouble — she was as far from saving Jim as ever.

It cost her an effort to rejoin the others, but she was equal to it and during the rest of her stay her conversation was a shade more audacious than usual.

CHAPTER XVI

GLADWYNE SURRENDERS

EVENING was drawing on when Bella strolled aimlessly down the ascending road that led to Marple's residence. On one hand of the road there was a deep rift, filled with shadow, in which a beck murmured among the stones, and the oaks that climbed to the ridge above flung their great branches against the saffron glow in the western sky. Fallen leaves, glowing brown and red, had gathered thick beneath one hedgerow and more came slowly sailing down; but Bella brushed through them unheeding, oblivious to her surroundings. She had suffered during the few days that had followed her interview with Gladwyne and even the sharp encounter with Miss Marple in which she had recently indulged had not cheered her, though it had left her friend smarting.

Presently she looked around with interest as a figure appeared farther up the road, and recognizing the fine poise and vigorous stride, she stopped and waited. Lisle was a bracing person to talk to, and she wanted to see him. He soon came up with her and she greeted him cordially. Unlike Gladwyne, he was a real man, resolute and resourceful, with a generous vein in him, and she did not resent the fact that he looked rather hard at her.

"You don't seem as cheerful as usual," he observed.

"I'm not," she confessed. "In fact, I think I was very nearly crying."

"What's the trouble?" He showed both interest and sympathy.

"Oh, you needn't ask. It's Jim again. I've tried every means and I can't do anything with him."

"He is pretty uncontrollable. Seems to have gone back to Batley again. I wonder if it would be any good if I looked for an opportunity for making a row with the fellow?"

"No," she answered, with appreciation, for this was very different from Gladwyne's attitude. "It would only separate Jim from you, and I don't want that to happen. Please keep hold of him, though I know that can't be pleasant for you."

"He is trying now and then, but I'll do what I can. Gladwyne, however, has more influence than I have. Did you think of asking him?"

She colored, and in her brief confusion he read his answer with strong indignation — she had pleaded with Gladwyne and he had refused to help.

"Do you know," she said, looking up at him, "you're the only real friend I have. There's nobody else I can trust."

"I think you're wrong in that," he declared; and acting on impulse he laid a hand protectingly on her shoulder, for she looked very dejected and forlorn. "Anyway, you mustn't worry. I'll do something — in fact, something will have to be done."

"What will you do?"

He knitted his brows. There was a course, which promised to be effective, open to him, but he was most

averse to adopting it. He could give Gladwyne a plain hint that he had better restrain his confederate, but he could enforce compliance only by stating what he knew about the former's desertion of his cousin. He was not ready to do that yet; it would precipitate the climax, and once his knowledge of the matter was revealed his power to use it in case of a stronger need might be diminished. The temptation to leave Jim Crestwick to his fate was strong, but his pity for the anxious girl was stronger.

"I'll have a talk with Gladwyne," he promised.

"That wouldn't be of the least use!"

"I think he'll do what I suggest," Lisle answered with a trace of grimness. "Make your mind easy; I'll have Batley stopped."

She looked at him in surprise, filled with relief and gratitude. He was one who would not promise more than he could perform; but how he could force his will on Gladwyne she did not know.

"You're wonderful!" she exclaimed. "Whatever one asks you're able to do."

"And you're very staunch."

"Oh!" she said, standing very close to him, with his hand still on her shoulder, "we won't exchange compliments — they're too empty, and you deserve something better." She glanced round swiftly. "Shut your eyes, tight!"

He obeyed her, and for a moment light fingers rested on his breast; then there was a faint warm touch upon his cheek. When he looked up she was standing a yard away, smiling mockingly.

"Don't trust your imagination too much — it might have deceived you," she warned. "But you

have sense; you wouldn't attach an undue value to anything."

"Confidence and gratitude are precious," he answered. "I'd better point out that I haven't earned either of them yet."

Bella was satisfied with this, but she grew graver, wondering how far she might have delivered Gladwyne into his hands. She was angry with the man, but she would not have him suffer.

"I don't know what power you have — but you won't make too much use of it — I don't wish that," she begged. "After all, though, Jim must be got out of that fellow's clutches."

"Yes," assented Lisle, "there's no doubt of it."

She left him presently and he went on down the dale, not exactly repenting of his promise, but regretting the necessity which had led to his making it. The task with which he had saddled himself was an exceedingly unpleasant one and might afterward make it more difficult for him to accomplish the purpose that had brought him to England, but he meant to carry it out.

As it happened, he met Mrs. Gladwyne at Millicent's, where he called, and he spent an uncomfortable half-hour in her company. She had shown in various ways that she liked him, and calling him to her side soon after he came in, she talked to him in an unusually genial manner. He felt like a traitor in this gracious lady's presence and it was a relief when she took her departure.

"You look troubled," Millicent observed.

"That's how I feel," he confessed. "After all, it

isn't a very uncommon sensation. It's sometimes difficult to see ahead."

"Often," she answered, smiling. "What do you do then — stop a little and consider?"

"Not as a rule. The longer you consider the difficulties, the worse they look. It's generally better to go right on."

Millicent agreed with this; and soon afterward Lisle took his departure and walked back to Nasmyth's in an unusually serious mood. They were sitting smoking when his host broached the subject that was occupying him.

"It's some time since you said anything about the project that brought you over," he remarked.

"That's so," assented Lisle. "I'm fixed much as I was when we last spoke of it. When I was in Canada, I thought I'd only to find Gladwyne and scare a confession out of him. Now I find that what I've undertaken isn't by any means so simple."

"I warned you that it wouldn't be."

"You were right. There's his mother to consider — it's a privilege to know her — she's devoted to the fellow. Then there's Millicent; in a way, she's almost as devoted, anyhow she's a staunch friend of his. I don't know how either of them would stand the revelation."

"It would kill Mrs. Gladwyne," Nasmyth declared.

There was silence for a while, and then Lisle spoke again.

"I'm badly worried; any move of mine would lead to endless trouble — and yet there's the black blot on the memory of the man to whom I owe so much; I

can't bring myself to let it remain. Besides all this, there's another complication."

"Young Crestwick's somehow connected with it," Nasmyth guessed.

Lisle did not deny it.

"That crack-brained lad seems to be the pivot on which the whole thing turns. Curious, isn't it? I wish the responsibility hadn't been laid on my shoulders. Just now I can't tell what I ought to do — it's harassing."

"Don't force things; wait for developments," Nasmyth advised him. "I'm not trying to extract information; the only reason I mentioned the subject is that a man in the home counties has asked me to come up for a few weeks and bring you along. He's a good sort, there's fair sport, and it's a nice place; but I don't mind in the least whether I go or not."

"Then I'd rather stay. I've a feeling that I may be wanted here."

"I'm quite satisfied, for a reason I'll explain. You have ridden that young bay horse of mine. He comes of good stock and he's showing signs of an excellent pace over the hurdles. Now I couldn't expect to enter him for any first-rate event — he's hardly fast enough and it's too expensive in various ways — but there's a little semi-private meeting to be held before long at a place about thirty miles off. I might have a chance there if we put him into training immediately. You know something about horses?"

"Not much," responded Lisle. "I've made one long journey in the saddle in Alberta; but you've seen our British Columbian trails. Our cayuses have generally to climb, and as a rule I've used horses only

for packing. Still, I'm fond of them; I'd be interested in the thing."

Nasmyth nodded.

"One difficulty is that there's nothing in the neighborhood that I could try him for pace against except that horse of Gladwyne's."

"He'd no doubt let you have the beast."

"It's possible," Nasmyth agreed dryly. "But I've objections to being indebted to him; and I don't want Batley, Marple and Crestwick to take a hand in and put their money on me. However, we'll think it over."

They retired to sleep soon afterward; and the next day Lisle walked across to call on Gladwyne, in a quietly determined mood. Clarence was in his library, and he looked up with some curiosity when Lisle was shown in. Lisle came to the point at once.

"You've no doubt noticed that Jim Crestwick has been going pretty hard of late," he said. "Bets, speculation, and that sort of thing. He can't keep it up on a minor's allowance. It will end in a bad smash if he isn't checked."

Gladwyne's manner became supercilious.

"I fail to see how it concerns you, or, for that matter, either of us."

"We won't go into the question — it's beside the point. What I want you to do is to pull him up."

He spoke as if he meant to be obeyed, and Gladwyne looked at him in incredulous astonishment.

"Do you suppose I'm able to restrain the lad?"

"You ought to be," Lisle answered coolly. "It's your friend Batley who's leading him on to ruin; I'm making no comments on your conduct in standing by and watching, as if you approved of it."

The man grew hot with anger.

"Thank you for your consideration." His tone changed to a sneer. "I suppose you couldn't be expected to realize that the attitude you're adopting is inexcusable?"

"If you don't like it, I'll try another," Lisle returned curtly. "You'll give Batley his orders to leave the lad alone right now."

Gladwyne rose with his utmost dignity, a fine gentleman whose feelings had been outraged by the coarse attack of a barbarian; but Lisle waved his hand in a contemptuous manner.

"Stop where you are; that kind of thing is thrown away on me. You're going to listen for a few minutes and afterward you're going to do what I tell you. To begin with — why, after you'd opened it, didn't you wipe out all trace of the cache on the reach below the last portage your cousin made?"

The shot obviously reached its mark, for Gladwyne clutched the table hard, and then sank back limply into his seat. He further betrayed himself by a swift, instinctive glance toward the rows of books behind him, and Lisle had no doubt that the missing pages from George Gladwyne's diary were hidden among them. He waited calmly, sure of his position, while Gladwyne with difficulty pulled himself together.

"Have you any proof that I found the cache?" he asked.

"I think so," Lisle informed him. "But we'll let that slide. You'd better take the thing for granted. I'm not here to answer questions. I've told you plainly what I want."

There was silence for nearly a minute during which

Gladwyne sat very still in nerveless dismay. All resistance had melted out of him, his weakness was manifest — he could not face a crisis, there was no courage in him.

"The miserable young idiot!" he broke out at length in impotent rage. "This is not the first trouble in which he has involved me!"

"Just so," said Lisle. "Not long ago his sister came here, begging you to save him, and you wouldn't. It's not my part to point what she must think of you. But I'm in a different position; you won't refuse me."

Gladwyne leaned forward, gripping the arms of his chair as if he needed support, and his face grew haggard.

"The difficulty is that I'm helpless," he declared.

Lisle regarded him with contempt.

"Brace up," he advised him. "The fellow you're afraid of is only flesh and blood; he has his weak point somewhere. Face him and find it, if you can't talk him round. There's no other way open to you."

A brief silence followed; and then Gladwyne broke it.

"I'll try. But suppose I can induce him to leave Crestwick alone?"

"So much the better for you," Lisle answered with a dry smile. "I'm not here to make a bargain. I don't want anything for myself."

He went out, consoling himself with the last reflection, for the part he had played had been singularly disagreeable. Passing down the wide staircase and through the great hall, he turned along the terrace with a sense of wonder and disgust. It was a stately house; the wide sweep of lawn where two gardeners

were carefully sweeping up the leaves, the borders beyond it, blazing with dahlias and ranks of choice chrysanthemums, conveyed the same suggestion of order, wealth and refinement. One might, he thought, have expected to find some qualities that matched with these — dignity, power, a fine regard for honor — in the owner of such a place, but he had not even common courage. An imposing figure, to outward seeming, the Canadian regarded him as one who owed everything to a little surface polish and his London clothes.

Lisle paused to look back when he reached the end of the terrace, from which a path that would save him a short walk led through a shrubbery. One wing of the building was covered with Virginia creeper that glowed with the gorgeous hues of a fading maple leaf, the sunlight lay on the grass, and the feeling of tranquillity that hung about the place grew stronger. He thought that he could understand how the desire to possess it would stir an Englishman reared in such surroundings, and yet he was now convinced that this was not the impulse which had driven Gladwyne into deserting his starving cousin. The man had merely yielded to craven fear.

He heard footsteps, and looking around was a little surprised to see Batley moving toward him.

"You have just called on Gladwyne," Batley began.

Lisle stopped. There was, so far as he knew, nothing to be said in favor of the man, but his cool boldness was tempered by a certain geniality and an occasional candor that the Canadian could not help appreciating. He preferred Batley to Gladwyne.

"That's so," he agreed.

"I'm inclined to think your visit concerned me.

I've noticed your interest in young Crestwick — it's obvious — I don't know whether one could say the same of the cause of it?"

"We won't discuss that. If you have anything to say to me, you had better adopt a less offensive style."

Batley smiled good-humoredly.

"You're quick at resenting things. I don't see why you should expect a longer patience from me."

"I don't expect anything from you," Lisle informed him. "In proof of it, I'll mention that I called to tell Gladwyne he must keep you off of Jim Crestwick."

He made a slip in the last few words, which the other quickly noticed.

"Ordered him, in fact," he said.

Lisle made no answer and Batley resumed:

"You have some kind of a hold on Gladwyne; so have I. Of course, it's no news to you. I'm a little curious to learn what yours consists of."

"Why?"

"It struck me that we might work together."

"I'm not going in for card-sharping or anything of that kind!"

The man seemed roused by this, but he mastered his anger.

"Civility isn't expensive and sometimes it's wise," he observed. "I won't return the compliment; in fact, I'll credit you with the most disinterested motives. All I mean is that I might help you and you might help me. I'm not quite what you seem to think I am, and if I can get my money back out of Gladwyne I won't harm him."

"I don't care in the least whether you harm him or

not. But I'll try to arrange that you drop Crestwick."

Batley considered this for a moment or two.

"Well," he said, "I'm sorry we can't agree; but as regards Crestwick you can only head me off by forcing Gladwyne to interfere. Between ourselves, do you think he's a man who's likely to take a bold course?"

"I think so — in the present case."

"You mean if the pressure's sufficient. Now you have given me a glimpse at your hand and I'll be candid. Gladwyne rather let me in, and there's a risk in dealing with a lad who's to all intents and purposes a minor; I've gone about as far with him as I consider judicious. Don't do anything that may damage Gladwyne financially without giving me warning, and in return I'll let Crestwick go. To some extent, I only got hold of him as an offset to the trouble I've had with Gladwyne. Is it a bargain? You can trust me."

"We'll let it go at that," replied Lisle. "But I'll keep my eye on you."

Batley's gesture implied that he would not object to this, and he turned away, leaving the Canadian to walk back to Nasmyth's thoughtfully. Lisle did not think he had done Gladwyne much harm by his tacit admissions, and he had some degree of confidence in Batley's assurance.

CHAPTER XVII

A BAD FALL

GLADWYNE spent the first few days that followed Lisle's visit in a state of dread and indecision. He had allowed the Canadian to understand that he would endeavor to prevent Crestwick's being further victimized, but he had already failed to induce Batley to abandon the exploitation of the lad and he had no cause for believing that a second attempt would be more successful. Moreover, he shrank from making it; the man had shown him clearly that he would brook no interference.

On the other hand, he was equally afraid of Lisle. This cool, determined Canadian was not to be trifled with, and he knew or suspected enough about the tragedy in British Columbia to make him dangerous. It was certain that a revelation of Batley's speculation would go a very long way toward establishing the truth of any damaging story Lisle thought fit to tell. Supposing the two by any chance combined their knowledge — that he had raised money in anticipation of his cousin's death, and afterward left him to perish — nothing that he could say would count against the inference. George had been a healthy man, not much older than Clarence, when the money was borrowed, and his decease within a limited time had appeared im-

probable. Nobody would believe the actual truth that Batley with characteristic boldness had, in return for what he thought a sufficient consideration in the shape of an exorbitant interest, taken a serious risk. The thing would look like a conspiracy between the heir presumptive and the speculator who lent the money; and in this, for a bold man, there might have been a loophole for escape, but Gladwyne knew that he had not the nerve to use the fact against his ally.

Nevertheless, Gladwyne was really guiltless in one respect — he had not desired his cousin's death; he would have gone back to the rescue had he not dreaded that he would share George's fate. Lack of courage had been his bane, and it was so now, for instead of speaking to Batley he temporized. The man had made no further attempt upon Crestwick, and Gladwyne decided that until he did so there was no need for him to interfere. Still, as the next few weeks passed, he was conscious of a growing dread of the Canadian which, as sometimes happens, became tinged with hatred. Lisle was the more serious menace, and it was ominous that he now and then exchanged a word or two with Batley. If the two formed an offensive alliance, he would be helpless at their hands.

In the meanwhile, Nasmyth has been training his horse for the approaching meeting and after trying him against one belonging to a neighbor and not finding it fast enough he had reluctantly fallen back on a chestnut owned by Gladwyne. The animal possessed a fine speed and some jumping powers. Its chief fault was a vicious temper; but Gladwyne was seldom troubled by lack of nerve in the saddle. It was in time of heavy moral strain that he failed, and

he was glad to arrange with Nasmyth for a sharp gallop.

Somewhat to the latter's regret, news of his intentions had spread, and on the morning of the trial a number of people, including the Marples and Crestwicks and Millicent, had gathered about the course. It was a dark day, with a moist air and a low, gray sky. The grass was wet, a strip of plowing which could not be avoided was soft and heavy, and the ground in front of several of the jumps was in a far from satisfactory state. Nasmyth, who kept a very small establishment and had hitherto generally ridden the horse, walked round part of the course with Lisle.

"It will be heavy going and there's a nasty greasy patch at the biggest fence," he said. "I'd have waited for a better day only that it's often wet where they have the meeting, and I want to see what he can do over ground like this. You'll have to watch him at the jumps."

"He'd do better with you in the saddle," Lisle suggested.

"I'd rather put you up. I'm not going to ride at the meeting; I'm over the weight they ought to give him and I want to get him used to a stranger's hands. As it's an outside event of no importance, I haven't fixed on my man yet."

They walked back toward the starting-point, where Gladwyne was waiting, with Batley and Crestwick in attendance. As they approached it, Millicent joined them.

"Are you going to ride to-day?" she asked Lisle.

"Nasmyth insists," was the answer. "I'm afraid I won't do him much credit."

Gladwyne looked up with a slight frown.

"You won't mind?" Nasmyth asked him. "I'd penalize the horse by nearly a stone."

"No," replied Gladwyne, shortly; "there's no reason why I should object."

This was true, but he had an unreasoning aversion to facing this opponent. Of late, the Canadian had caused him trouble at almost every turn, and it looked as if he could not even indulge in a morning's amusement without being plagued with him. He was conscious of a most uncharitable wish that Lisle would come to grief at one of the fences and break his neck. In many ways, this would be a vast relief.

"Would anybody like to make it a sporting match?" Crestwick asked. "The bay's my fancy; I'm ready to back it."

Bella tried to catch his eye, but he disregarded this. She, however, saw Lisle glance at Batley and noticed the latter's smile.

"It isn't worth while betting on trials," Batley declared. "Better wait until the meeting."

The girl was less astonished than gratified. Gladwyne was surprised and disconcerted. He had said nothing to Batley about Crestwick, but he had noticed Lisle's warning glance, and the other's prompt acquiescence appeared significant. It looked as if the two had joined hands, and that was what he most dreaded. An almost overpowering rage against the Canadian possessed him. When he attempted to mount, the chestnut gave him trouble by backing and plunging; but the bay was quiet and Nasmyth stood for a few moments by Lisle's stirrup.

"Save him a bit for the second round," he advised.

"Another thing, look out when you come to the big-brushed hurdles, particularly the second time."

Batley volunteered as starter, and when he got them off satisfactorily the spectators scattered, one or two to watch the pace across the plowed land, the others moving toward the stiffest jumps — the course was roughly circular.

The trial was a new experience to Lisle, and he felt the exhilaration of it as, remembering his instructions, he strove to hold his mount. Gladwyne's horse was a length ahead of him, the wind lashed his face, and the thrill of the race grew keener when he swept over the first fence, hard upon the flying chestnut's heels. He dropped another length behind as they crossed the next field and labored over the sticky plowing; then there was a low fence and ditch, a narrow meadow, and then the hurdles Nasmyth had mentioned, filling a gap in a tall thorn hedge. They were wattled with branches which projected a foot or so above them.

It did not look an easy jump and the grass was slippery and soft, but the chestnut accomplished it cleverly and the bay flew at the hurdles with every sign of confidence. Then, though Lisle felt the hoofs slide as the beast took off, they were over and flying faster than ever across a long, wet field. As they approached the end of the first round, the chestnut began to drop back; Lisle could let the bay go and he determined to bring him home the winner. It was his first fast ride in England; and he had, indeed, seldom urged a horse to its utmost pace — the British Columbian trails, for the most part, led steeply up or down rugged hillsides, where speed was out of the question. It was very different on these level English meadows, though the

ground was softer than usual and the fences were troublesome. He rode with a zest and ardor he had hardly expected to feel.

He led at the next fence and some of the onlookers shouted encouragement when, drawing a little farther ahead, he once more reached the sticky plowed land. Here the bay slowed a little, toiling across the clods, but a glance over his shoulder showed his opponent still at least two lengths behind. Gladwyne, however, now roused himself to ride in earnest. Hitherto he had taken no great interest in the proceedings, but he had just seen Bella wave her hand to Lisle and then Millicent's applauding smile. He resented the fact that both should be pleased to see him beaten by this intrusive stranger. It reawakened his rancor, and the strain of the last week or two had shaken him rather badly. He was nervous, his self-control was weak; but he meant to pass his rival.

He was still behind at the next fence, but pressing his horse savagely he crept up a little as they approached the one really difficult jump; and as they sped across the narrow meadow Lisle fancied that the bay was making its last effort. Crestwick was standing near the hurdles, with Nasmyth moving rapidly toward them not far away and Bella running across a neighboring field. Crestwick watched Gladwyne intently. The man's face was strangely eager, considering that all he had been asked to do was to test the bay's speed, and there was a hardness in his expression that fixed Crestwick's attention; he wondered the cause of it.

Bella was close to him, when Lisle, riding hard, rushed at the hurdles, and Jim found it hard to repress

a shout as the bay's hoofs slipped and slid on the treacherous turf. The horse rose, however; there was a heavy crash; wattled branches and the top bar of the hurdle smashed. Lisle lurched in his saddle; and then the bay came down in a heap, with the man beneath him.

It was impossible to doubt that Gladwyne had seen the accident, but the chestnut rushed straight at the shattered hurdle, teeth bare, nostrils dilated, head stretched forward, and Crestwick thrilled with horror. The fallen horse was struggling, rolling upon its rider, just beyond the fence; but Gladwyne did nothing, except sit ready for the leap. It was incomprehensible; so was the look in the man's face, which was grimly set, as the big chestnut rose in a graceful bound.

There was a sickening thud on the other side, a flounder of slipping hoofs, and the staccato pounding of the gallop broke out again. The chestnut had come down upon the fallen horse or helpless man, and was going on, uncontrollable. Crestwick rushed madly at the hedge, and scrambling through, badly scratched and bareheaded, found Nasmyth trying to drag Lisle clear of the bay. The Canadian's eyes were half open, but there was no expression in them; one arm and shoulder looked distorted, and his face was gray. Half-way across the field Gladwyne was struggling savagely with the plunging chestnut.

"Get hold!" ordered Nasmyth hoarsely. "Some bones broken, by the look of him; but he'll have his brains knocked out in another moment."

Crestwick was cruelly kicked as the bay rolled in agony, striking with its hoofs; but he stuck to his task, and with some difficulty they dragged Lisle out

of danger. When they had accomplished it, Marple came running up with two or three others and Nasmyth called to him.

"Came in the car, didn't you? Go off for Irvine as hard as you can drive. Drop somebody at my place to run back with a gun."

Marple swung round and set off across the field, and Crestwick understood why the gun was wanted when he glanced at the fallen horse. Nasmyth informed him that nothing could be done until the doctor came, and he turned away toward where his sister was waiting. His forehead and hands were torn and he was conscious of a bad ache in his back where a hoof had struck, but these things scarcely troubled him. He was overwhelmed, horror-stricken; and the shock of seeing Lisle crushed and senseless was not the only cause of it. Bella, gasping after her run, with hair shaken loose about her face, seemed to be suffering from the same sensation that unnerved him.

"Is he dead?" she asked falteringly.

"No. Badly hurt, I think."

"Ah!" she exclaimed with intense relief. "I was most horribly afraid." She paused before she resumed: "You were close by the hurdles."

Jim knew she meant that he must have seen what happened, but, shaking as he was, he looked hard at her, wondering in a half-dazed fashion what reply he should make. He thought her suspicions were aroused.

"You were some way back; you couldn't have seen anything plainly," he ventured.

"I was very near — looking back toward them — when they crossed the field before the jump. You've gone all to pieces. What did you see?"

"I can't talk about it now," Jim broke out. "He's coming back."

Gladwyne had dismounted and was with some difficulty leading the chestnut toward the hedge. His face was white; he moved with a strong suggestion of reluctance; and when he reached the spot where Lisle lay he seemed to have trouble in speaking.

"Is it dangerous?" he asked.

"I can't tell," Nasmyth answered sternly. "Shoulder's smashed; don't know if that's the worst. Why didn't you pull up the brute or send him at the hedge to the right?"

"He's hard in the mouth — you know his temper. You couldn't have turned him."

"I'd have tried, if I'd had to bring him down and break his neck!"

Nasmyth checked himself, for this was not the time for recriminations, and Millicent, who had been running hard, brushed past them. She did not stop until she bent over Lisle. Then she turned to Nasmyth with fear in her strained expression.

"I think he'll get over it," Nasmyth told her. "I won't take the responsibility of having him moved until the doctor arrives."

"Quite right," agreed Batley, walking up and casting a swift and searching glance at Gladwyne.

"But you can't let him lie on the wet grass!" Millicent expostulated.

"I'm afraid we must; it's safest," said Batley. "The shock's not so much to be dreaded with a man of his kind."

He and Nasmyth took charge of the situation, sternly refusing to listen to all well-meant suggestions,

until at last the doctor and Marple came hurrying across the field. The former hastily examined the injured man and then looked up at Nasmyth.

"Upper arm gone, close to the shoulder joint," he announced. "Collar-bone too. I'll give him some brandy. Shout to those fellows with the stretcher."

He was busy for some time, and in the meanwhile Batley picked up the flask he had laid down and handed it to Gladwyne.

"Take a good drink and pull yourself together," he said quietly.

At length Lisle was gently lifted on to the stretcher, and as they carried him away the report of a gun ran out. The onlookers dispersed and Gladwyne was walking home alone when Millicent overtook him. She was puzzled by his limp appearance and the expression of his haggard face. It was only natural that he should keenly feel his responsibility for the accident, but this did not quite seem to account for the man's condition. He looked absolutely unnerved, like one who had barely escaped from some appalling catastrophe.

"You shouldn't take it quite so much to heart," she comforted him. "I don't think Irvine felt any great uneasiness; and nobody could blame you."

"You're the only one who has said so," he answered moodily.

"They couldn't; you stole away. Of course, it's a great pity — I'm distressed — but you must try to be sensible. These accidents happen."

He walked on a while in silence, and then with an effort looked around at her.

"Millicent," he said, "you're wonderfully generous

— the sight of anybody in trouble stirs you — but I don't feel able to bear your sympathy."

"Then I'll have to offer it to Lisle," she smiled. "But I'll walk with you to the lodge; and then you had better go in and keep quiet until you get back your nerve."

When she left Gladwyne she went on to Nasmyth's, where she waited until the doctor on leaving told her that he was perfectly satisfied with the prospect for the Canadian's recovery. It would, he said, be merely a question of lying still for a considerable time. Millicent was conscious of a relief which puzzled her by its intensity as she heard the news, but she asked Nasmyth to send somebody to inform Gladwyne.

"I think he's desperately anxious and feeling the thing very badly," she concluded.

"Then he could have come over to inquire, as you have done," Nasmyth answered. "In my opinion, he deserves to be uncomfortable."

"Why are you so hard on him?"

The man's face grew grim.

"I've had to help Irvine with Lisle, for one thing. We were satisfied that his injuries were not caused by the bay rolling on him; he seems to have escaped from that with a few bad bruises. The worst of the accident might have been avoided if Clarence had had nerve enough."

"But you couldn't blame him very greatly for losing his head — he had no warning, scarcely a moment to think. It was so sudden."

"The result's the same," retorted Nasmyth. "Lisle has to pay. But to please you I'll send Clarence word that Irvine's not anxious about him."

CHAPTER XVIII

A PRUDENT DECISION

IT had been dark some time and the night was raw, but Jim Crestwick strolled up and down the drive to Marple's house, thinking unusually hard. In the first place, part at least of the folly of his conduct during the last year or two had been plainly brought home to him, and the realization was bitter. It was galling to discover that while he had regarded himself as a man of the world he had been systematically victimized by the men who had encouraged him in the delusion. He felt very sore as he remembered how much he owed Batley, but this troubled him less than the downright abhorrence of Gladwyne which had suddenly possessed him. He had looked up to the latter as a model and had tried to copy his manners; and it was chiefly because Batley was a friend of Gladwyne's that he had paid toll to him. For he had felt that whatever the man he admired was willing to countenance must be the correct thing. Now he saw Gladwyne as he really was — a betrayer of those who trusted him, a counterfeit of an honorable type, one who had by the merest chance escaped from crime.

In the second place, he was concerned about Bella. She had obviously been attracted by Gladwyne, and it was his duty to warn her. Whether the warning was altogether necessary he could not tell — he had watched her face that morning — and Bella sometimes resented

advice. When she did so, she had an exasperating trick of putting him in the wrong; but he meant to speak to her as plainly as appeared desirable. He had another duty — to Lisle; but he was inclined to think that on the whole he had better not saddle himself with it. His self-confidence had been rudely shaken and he recognized the possibility of his making things worse. Moreover, he had cultivated the pride of caste, and having with some difficulty obtained an entry to the circle in which Gladwyne moved, he felt it incumbent on him to guard the honor of all who belonged to it.

Presently Bella came out, as he had anticipated, and joined him.

"You have been very quiet since this morning," she began. "I saw that you meant to slip away as soon as you could."

"Yes," he admitted; "I've had something to think about — I've been a fool, Bella; the commonest, most easily gulled kind of imbecile!"

He had expected her to remind him that she had more than once tried to convince him of this, but she failed to do so. Instead, she answered with a touch of the candor that sometimes characterized her.

"You're not the only one."

This was satisfactory, for it suggested that she had been undeceived about Gladwyne; but she had not finished.

"What did you see this morning?" she asked, and he felt that she was speaking with keen anxiety.

"I'll tell you, but it must never go any farther. I hate to think of it! But first of all, what makes you ask?"

She had already mentioned that she had been near when Gladwyne made his attempt to come up with Lisle, but she had not explained that she had seen hatred stamped in hideous plainness on his face.

"Never mind," she answered sharply. "Go on!"

"Well," said Jim, "I was standing right against the hedge, the only person on that side, and I don't think Gladwyne saw me. Lisle's bay fouled the top bar of the hurdle, but it held long enough to bring him down in a heap. Gladwyne was then a length or two behind. He rode straight at the broken hurdle, hands still — I can't get his look out of my mind!"

"But perhaps he couldn't pull up," Bella defended him desperately, as if she would not believe the truth she dreaded.

"There were other ways open. He could have gone at the hedge a yard or two on one side; he could have spoiled the chestnut's take-off and made him jump short. It might have brought him down — the hurdle was firm in the ground — but that would have been better than riding over a fallen man!"

"Are you sure he did nothing?"

"I wish I were not! The thing's horrible! Gladwyne must have seen that he'd come down on Lisle or the struggling bay — he could have prevented it — he didn't try."

Bella shivered. Her brother was right: it was almost beyond contemplation. But that was only half of the matter.

"He must have had a reason," she argued harshly.

"Yes; one doesn't ride over a man in cold-blood for nothing. I think he had some cause for being afraid of Lisle; several things I remember now point to it.

His chance came suddenly — nobody could have arranged it — he only remembered that Lisle with his brains crushed out could do him no harm."

The girl recognized that Jim had guessed correctly. When she had gone to Lisle for help, he had allowed her to understand that he could compel Gladwyne's compliance with his request, which was significant. Still, convinced as she was, she would not openly acquiesce in her brother's theory.

"Jim," she protested, "if he'd ridden at the hedge or made the chestnut jump short, he might have broken his own neck. He must have realized it — it would make him hesitate."

The lad laughed scornfully.

"It's quite possible, but is that any excuse? Would Nasmyth or Lisle or Batley have shirked a risk that would mean the saving of the other fellow? Supposing your idea's right — though it isn't — it only shows the man as a disgusting coward."

There was no gainsaying this; and Bella was crushed and humiliated. She had already seen Gladwyne's weakness, and after the choice she had been compelled to make between him and her brother, she had tried to drive all thought of him out of her mind. It had been difficult; he was fascinating in many ways and she had set her heart upon his capture. Now she had done with him; after the morning's revelation she shrank from him with positive horror. Jim seemed to guess this.

"I'm sorry, Bella," he said gently. "But the fellow's impossible."

She laid her hand upon his arm.

"Jim," she replied, "we have both been mad, and

I suppose we must pay for it. I'll help you to get clear of Batley when the time comes, but you must never have a deal of any kind with him again."

"That's promised; I've had my lesson. I think I'll ask Lisle to take me with him when he goes back to Canada. He and Nasmyth are the only men worth speaking of I've met for a long while. When Lisle first came here I tried to patronize him."

Bella laughed, rather feebly, but she wanted to relieve the tension.

"It was like you. But we'll go in. This is our secret, Jim. Nobody would believe you if you let fall a hint as to what really happened, and there are many reasons why you shouldn't. I think you said nobody else could have suspected?"

"Nasmyth hadn't come up when the chestnut reached the hurdles; he was the nearest. Lisle was down with the horse upon him. He couldn't have seen anything."

"Well," she decided, "perhaps that's fortunate. It isn't likely that Gladwyne will get such an opportunity again, and at the worst he acted on the spur of the moment."

The lad nodded. He had felt that silence would entail some responsibility, but Bella accepted it without uneasiness. She seldom showed any hesitation when she had decided on a course.

In the meanwhile, Gladwyne had spent a miserable day, alternating between horror of himself and doubts about the future. Jim Crestwick's description of the incident was correct — Gladwyne had ridden straight at the broken hurdle, knowing what the consequences might be and disregarding them. The next moment,

however, the reaction had begun and he was thankful that he had not committed a hideous crime. Indeed, the knowledge that he had come so near to killing his opponent had left him badly shaken. He wondered at his insensate action until he recollected how he had once stood beside an opened cache in Canada, and then, ignoring his manifest duty, had hurried on through the frozen wilderness. On that occasion he had been accountable for his cousin's death, and now Lisle had very narrowly escaped.

Yet he could with justice acquit himself of any premeditated intention in either case; fate had thrust him into a situation he was not strong enough to grapple with. Dreading Lisle, as he did, his chief thought had been for his own safety when he saw the bay blunder at the leap. To save the Canadian he must take a serious personal risk, which was foreign to his nature, and though a recognition of the fact that the death of the fallen man would be a great relief to him had been clearly in his mind, it was impossible to say how far it had actuated him.

He had grown more collected when he sat in his library as dusk was closing in, considering other aspects of the affair. He had not seen Crestwick, and Lisle, he thought, would remember nothing except his fall. After trying to recall the positions of the others, he felt comforted; nobody could charge him with anything worse than reckless riding or a failure of nerve at a critical moment. He would confess to the latter — it was to some extent the truth — and show concern about Lisle's injury. Awkward as it was, the incident could be smothered over; it was consoling to remember that the people he lived among were addicted to treat-

ing anything of an unpleasant nature as lightly as possible. There was a good deal to be said for the sensible English custom of ignoring what it would be disconcerting to realize.

After a while his mother came in and gently touched him.

"My dear," she urged, "you mustn't brood over it. Lisle's condition's satisfactory. As it's some hours since we got Nasmyth's message, I sent a man over and he has just come back."

"I'm glad you sent," Gladwyne responded. "It was thoughtful. I forgot; but I've been badly troubled."

She sat down near him, with her hand laid caressingly on his arm.

"It's natural; I understand and feel for you. I wouldn't have liked you to be indifferent; but you mustn't make too much of it. The man is strong, he will soon be about again, and you couldn't have saved him. Everybody I've seen so far has given me that impression. Of course, I didn't need their assurances, but I was glad to see they exonerated and sympathized with you."

Her confidence hurt him; he had still a sense of shame, and he found no great comfort in what she told him. His mother was generally loved, and he wondered how far his neighbors had been influenced by a desire to save her pain.

"It looks as if Lisle deserves their commiseration more than I do," he answered with a smile which cost him an effort.

"It is being shown. I noticed nearly everybody in the neighborhood motoring or driving toward the house

during the afternoon. Millicent's with Nasmyth now, helping to arrange things. It's wonderful what a favorite Lisle has become in so short a time; but I own that I find something very likable about him."

Gladwyne moved impatiently. His hatred of the man was as strong as ever, and his mother's attempts at consolation irritated him. Lisle was too popular; first Bella and now Millicent had taken him in hand.

"Millicent," Mrs. Gladwyne went on, "is an exceptional woman in every desirable respect. I think you have long been as convinced of that as I am."

"I'm afraid she can't have an equally favorable opinion of me," he said with a short laugh.

"One does not look for perfection in a man," his mother informed him seriously. "He is criticized much less severely than a woman. It seems to be the universal rule, though I have sometimes thought it wasn't absolutely just and that it had its drawbacks. It's one of the things the women who go out and speak are declaiming against and something one of them lately said sticks in my mind." She sighed as she added: "The times are changing; there was no need to consider such questions in your father's case. He was the soul of honor — you were very young when death parted us."

She did not always express herself clearly, but Gladwyne saw that she did not place him in the same category as his father and he recognized her half-formulated thought that it would have been better had he grown up under the latter's firmer guidance.

"Wonders never cease, mother," he responded with an attempt at lightness. "It's difficult to imagine

your being influenced by the latest propaganda. I thought you shuddered at it."

"Well," she said, "I was forgetting what I meant to talk about, drifting away from the subject; I'm afraid it's a habit of mine. What I have long felt is that it would be so desirable if you married suitably."

"The trouble is to define the suitability. It's a point upon which everybody has a different opinion."

"I would choose a girl of good family and education for you, one with a well-balanced will, who could see what was right and cling to it. Still, she must be wise and gentle; a tactful, considerate guide; and though means are not of first importance, they are not to be despised."

Gladwyne leaned back in his chair with a laugh that had in it a tinge of irritation.

"Are such girls numerous? But why do you insist on a will and the power of guiding? It looks as if you thought I needed it. Sometimes you're the reverse of flattering."

His mother looked troubled; she would have wounded no living creature unnecessarily.

"My dear, it's not always easy to express what one feels, and I dare say I'm injudicious in choosing my words. But your welfare is very near to my heart."

"I know that," he answered gently. "But you were not describing an imaginary paragon. Hadn't you Millicent in your mind?"

"I should be very happy if I could welcome her as my daughter. I should feel that you were safe then."

There was a thrill of regret in her voice that touched him. It hinted that she blamed herself for omissions and lack of wisdom in his upbringing. Besides, her

confidence in any one who had won her respect, as Millicent had done, was bestowed so generously.

"I'm afraid I've often given you trouble, and I do you little credit now," he said. "But, as to the other matter, one can't be sure that Millicent would welcome the idea. Of late I've had a suspicion that she hasn't a very high opinion of me."

"You could hardly expect to gain it by devoting yourself to Miss Crestwick."

The man smiled rather grimly.

"If it's any consolation to you, I'm inclined to think that Miss Crestwick has let me drop. The truth's not very flattering, but I can't hide it."

Mrs. Gladwyne's relief was obvious, but she had more to say and she ventured upon it with some courage.

"If you would only get rid of Batley too!"

"I can hardly do that just now; he's useful in several ways. Still, of course, if I married —"

He broke off abruptly, for his mother had occasional flashes of discernment.

"Millicent has means," she said.

He started at this, wondering how much she had guessed, but he veiled his embarrassment with a smile.

"Well," he acknowledged, "means, as you most wisely remarked, are not to be despised, and mine are unfortunately small."

She saw that she had said enough and she left him sitting in the darkening room thinking rather hard. Bella had thrown him over when he had refused to help her brother, and there were many ways in which Millicent appealed to him. Besides, she could free him of his debt to Batley, which was a thing greatly to be

desired. She had shown that she did not blame him severely for the accident at the hurdles, but he realized that in trying to comfort him she had been prompted by pity for his dejected mood, and it was clear that the part he had played was scarcely likely to raise him in her esteem. This was unfortunate, but he would not dwell on it; there were other points to consider and anything that served to divert his thoughts from the unfortunate affair was a vast relief.

When at last he rose he had partly recovered his usual equanimity and had decided that he would watch for some sign of Millicent's feelings toward him. He was aware that they had somewhat changed, but this was to a large extent his fault, and with caution and patience he thought it might be possible to reinstate himself in her favor.

CHAPTER XIX

GLADWYNE GAINS A POINT

SOME weeks had passed since the accident and Lisle was lying one afternoon on a couch near a window of Nasmyth's sitting-room. Two or three Canadian newspapers lay on the floor and he held a few letters in one hand. The prospect outside was cheerless — a stretch of leaden-colored moor running back into a lowering sky, with a sweep of fir wood that had lost all distinctive coloring in the foreground. He was gazing at it moodily when Millicent came in. His face brightened at the sight of her, and he raised himself awkwardly with his uninjured arm, but she shook her head at him in reproof.

"You had orders to keep as quiet as possible for some time yet. Lie down again!"

"Keeping quiet is fast breaking me up," he protested. "I'm quite able to move about."

"All the same, you're not to try."

He looked at her with a twinkle in his eyes.

"Then I suppose I'll have to give in. You're a determined person. People do what you ask them without resenting it. You have an instance here, though in a general way it's a very undignified thing to be ordered about."

He resumed his former position and she seated herself.

"I don't see why you should drag my character in," she objected with a smile. "Other people who occasionally obey me don't say such things."

"They're English; that accounts for a good deal. I'm inclined to think my power of expressing my feelings on any point is a gift, though it's one that's not uncommon in the West."

"Doesn't it presuppose an assurance that any one you address must be interested in your views?"

"I deserve that," he laughed; "but you're not quite right. We say, in effect, 'These are my sentiments, but I won't be down-hearted if you haven't the sense to agree with them.' The last, however, doesn't apply to you."

"Thank you for the explanation," she rejoined. "But why do you insist on a national difference? You're really English, aren't you, in Canada?"

"No," he answered; "you and the others who talk in that strain are mistaken. We're a brand new nation still fusing and fuming in the melting-pot. The elements are inharmonious in some respects — French from the Laurentian littoral, Ontario Scots, Americans, Scandinavians, Teutons, Magyars, Slavs. The English element's barely strong enough to temper the mixture; the land's too wide and the people too varied for British traditions to bind. When the cooling amalgam's run out it will be into a fresh mold."

"One made in Pennsylvania, or wherever the American foundries are?"

"They run the one you have in mind at Washington. You understand things a good deal better than many people I've talked to here; but you're not right yet. If Canadians deliberately chose the American

mold because it was American, a number of us would kick; but the cause is a bigger one than that. From Texas to Athabasca, from Florida to Labrador, pretty much the same elemental forces are fanning the melting fires. We have the same human raw material; we've much the same problems to tackle; the conditions are, or soon will be, pretty similar. It's only natural that the result should be more or less identical. I've said nothing yet about our commercial and social relations with our neighbors."

"But doesn't England count?"

"Morally, yes. It's your part to keep our respect and show us a clean lead."

"After all," she rejoined, "you, in particular, are essentially English by connection with the part of the country you're now staying in."

He smiled curiously.

"So you or Nasmyth have been tracing up the family!"

"No," she replied with a little sharpness. "Why should I have done so? Of course, we knew the name; and you have relations living at no great distance. I understand Nasmyth got a hint that they would be glad to receive you."

"Let it go at that," he answered. "My father was cast out because he dared to think for himself and my mother was Canadian born. I'm a unit in the new nation; one of the rank and file."

She considered this for a moment or two. It was hardly an English point of view, but — for his family had long been one of station — there was a hint of pride that struck her as rather fine about this renunciation. It was a risky thing to insist on being taken at

one's intrinsic value, stripped of all accidental associations that might enhance it, but she thought he need not shrink from the hazard. Now and then he spoke with slightly injudicious candor, and sometimes too vehemently, but in essential matters he displayed an admirable delicacy of feeling and she recognized in him a sterling sense of honor.

"I've broken loose again and you're feeling shocked," he said humorously. "It's your own fault; you have a way of making one talk. There's no use in discoursing to people who don't understand. However — and it's much more important — how's the book getting on?"

"More important than my wounded susceptibilities?" Millicent laughed. "But we won't mind them. I'm pleased to say I've heard from the publishers that it's in strong request. Indeed, they add, rather superfluously, that the demand is somewhat remarkable, considering the nature of the work."

Lisle laughed at this.

"Any more reviews?"

She handed him several and he noticed the guarded, unenthusiastic tone of the first two.

"These are the people who prefer a thing like a catalogue. This fellow says the first portion of the book shows most care in particulars and classification — it's what one would expect from him. That was your brother's work, I think. He was not an imaginative person."

"No," replied Millicent. "He was eminently practical and methodical."

"There's a great deal to be said in favor of that kind of man. You can trust him when it's a case of

grappling with practical difficulties. But I feel quite angry with the next reviewer. 'The illustrations are rather impressionist drawings than a useful guide to identification.' The fellow would no doubt rather have those stiff, colored plates which are about as like the real, breathing creature as a stuffed specimen in a museum."

Millicent was pleased with his indignation, but his disgusted expression changed as he read the next cutting.

"Now," he exclaimed, "we're arriving at the sound sense of ordinary people, lovers of nature who're not naturalists. This man's enthusiastic; the next review's even better!" He took up the others and there was keen satisfaction in his eyes when he laid them down. "Great!" he ejaculated. "I expected it. You've made your mark!"

The girl thrilled with pleasure; his delight at her success was so genuine.

"Well," she told him, "the publishers suggest that I undertake another and more ambitious work. I've often thought that I should like to do so. The lonely country between the Rockies and the Pacific has a peculiar interest to me and I've long had a desire to follow my brother's trail. I don't think it's a morbid wish — somehow I feel impelled to go."

"It's a beautiful, wild land, and the creatures that inhabit it are among the finest in the world. You promised to let me be your guide, and you should take Nasmyth, too; he's a man to be depended on. You could start in the early summer next year."

She smiled at his eagerness; but he suddenly grew thoughtful.

"It's curious how events seem to have started beside those lonely river-reaches among the rocks," he remarked. "It was there that I got to know Nasmyth, and through him I met you. It was there that I learned something about your brother and Clarence Gladwyne. The drama began in those wilds and I've a feeling that it will end among them."

"The drama?" she queried, and he was conscious that he had made a slip.

"Well," he answered, "before we crossed the big divide I wasn't aware of your existence, and I'd only a hazy idea that I might come to England some day. Now, if I may say it, I've joined your group of friends and entered into their lives. One feels it can't have sprung from nothing; it isn't blind chance."

She mused for a few moments.

"It's strange," she asserted, "but I've had something of the same feeling. You seem to have become a part of things, a connecting link between us all — Mrs. Gladwyne, Clarence, Nasmyth, and even young Crestwick. One could almost fancy that some mysterious agency were working upon us through you."

He did not wish her to pursue this train of thought too far.

"I've promised to take Jim Crestwick back with me," he said. "I'm going as soon as I'm fit to get about."

"Going back, in a few weeks?"

"Yes. In many ways, I'm sorry; but I've had some letters that show it's needful. Business calls."

She made no reply for some moments. There was no doubt that she would miss him badly, and she re-

called the strange and tense anxiety of which she had been conscious when he had fallen at the hurdles.

"We have come to look upon you as one of us," she told him simply. "Somehow we never contemplated your going away, and now it seems an almost unnatural thing."

"It would be, if I broke off the connection with my English friends, but I think that can't be done. We're to see more of each other; I'm to be your guide when you come out next year."

"It's very likely that I shall come."

She left him shortly after this and walked home in a thoughtful mood, regretting his approaching departure and pondering over what he had said. With reflection it became clearer that she had entertained the same idea as his. He and she and the others he mentioned were not acting and reacting upon one another casually; it was all a part of a purpose, leading up to something that still lay unrevealed on the knees of destiny. Perhaps he had been right in speaking of a drama; it suggested a sequence of prearranged events, springing from George's death. Reaching home, she endeavored to banish these thoughts, which were vaguely troublesome, but Miss Hume found her preoccupied and absent-minded during the evening.

The following day she went over to see Mrs. Gladwyne and was asked to wait until her return. Shortly afterward, Clarence entered the room where she was sitting, and she alluded to her visit to Lisle.

"He is going back as soon as he can stand the journey," she said.

Gladwyne made an abrupt movement and she noticed with surprise and some indignation the relief in his

expression. Though the men had not been on very cordial terms, it puzzled her.

"You don't attempt to conceal your satisfaction," she commented. "Isn't it a little ungenerous?"

His effort to recover his composure was obvious, but he answered her quietly.

"I'm afraid it is. After the accident — I think I was partly blamed for that — he behaved very well; told everybody about the slippery ground and said what he could to exonerate me."

"I didn't mean to refer to that matter," explained Millicent. She knew that it was a painful one to him.

"Still," he resumed, "even if it's ungrateful, I am rather glad he's going."

"'Rather glad' hardly seems to describe it; you looked overjoyed."

"Don't be severe, Millicent. Let me explain. Since Lisle came over, nothing has been quite the same. He got hold of you and Nasmyth and the others, and in a way alienated you from me. I don't mean he did it with deliberate intention, but he took up your time and monopolized your interest. I've seen much less of both of you."

"And, of late, of the Crestwicks."

"Oh," he returned in his most casual manner, "I shouldn't have had much more of their company in any case. Jim's going to Canada and Bella to Sussex. I understand from Marple that it will be some time before she visits us again."

Millicent was glad to hear it, but she made no comment.

"It's unreasonable to blame Lisle," Gladwyne went

on; "though he did make some unpleasantness with Batley; but I have had so many annoyances and troubles since he arrived. Everything has been going wrong and I can't disassociate him from the unfortunate tendency."

He sat where the light fell upon his face, and Millicent, studying it, was stirred to compassion, which was always ready with her. He looked harassed and nervous, as if he had borne a heavy strain, and she knew that the accident had preyed upon his mind. That, she thought, was to his credit. In addition to this, she had suspected that he was threatened with financial difficulties. The man had a dangerous gift of rousing women's interest and sympathy.

"I'm sorry," she said with sincere feeling. "You should go away for a time. You need a change."

"I've thought of it; but I'm afraid I've been neglecting things lately and there's a good deal that needs straightening up — farm buildings to be looked to, the stream to dyke in the low ground, and that draining scheme."

It was not all acting; he had meant to give those matters some attention when he found it convenient, and she was far from suspicious and was quick to take the most favorable view of any one. That he recognized his duties and intended to discharge them gratified her.

"I think," she told him, "that if you undertake these things in earnest, you'll be better for the occupation; and they certainly need looking after."

"I've been slack," he owned. "I seemed to lose interest and, as I said, I've had difficulties to distract me."

He had struck the right note again. Anything of the nature of a confession or appeal for sympathy seldom failed to stir her.

"In fact," he resumed, "I'm not clear of troubles now. If I do half that I'm asked to do, it will nearly ruin me, and I don't know where to begin. I haven't any great confidence in Grierson's advice; he doesn't seem to grip things readily."

"The trouble is that he has his favorites," she said bluntly. "I don't think he suffers from any lack of understanding."

"What do you mean?"

It was unpleasant, but she had courage and the man was doing Clarence harm.

"Well, there are people who can get very much what they ask Grierson for, in the shape of repairs and improvements, whether they need it or not."

"At my expense, while the rest get less than they should have?"

"A number of your tenants have got practically nothing for some years. It's false economy; you'll have to lay out twice as much as would keep them here satisfied, when they leave you in disgust."

She supplied him with several instances of neglect, and a few clever suggestions, and he looked at her in admiration which was only partly assumed.

"What an administrator you would have made!" he exclaimed. "The place would thrive in your hands and everybody be content. It's obvious, quite apart from his good qualities, why George was so popular."

Millicent did not suspect him of an intent to flatter her, and she recognized that there was truth in what he said. She knew everybody on the estate and knew

their most pressing needs, and she undoubtedly possessed the power of management. She had a keen discernment and could arrive at a quick and just decision.

"Clarence," she said, "I shouldn't advise you to take the business altogether out of Grierson's hands. He's honest, so far as you are concerned, and one or two of the hardest things he did were by your orders."

"You mean the Milburn and Grainger affair?" He showed a little embarrassment. "Well, perhaps I was hasty then, but they would have exasperated a much more patient man. I sometimes feel that I can't please these people, whatever I do."

She smiled at this.

"They're not effusive, but they're loyal once you win their confidence. But, to go back to Grierson — let him collect payments and handle the money, but don't ask his advice as to how you will lay it out. Look around, inquire into things, and trust your own judgment."

He turned to her beseechingly.

"I can't trust it in these matters — it hasn't been cultivated. If I'm to keep out of further trouble and do any good, you must help me."

Millicent hesitated. It was not a little thing he asked. To guide him aright would need thought and patient investigation. Still, there was, as she had said, so much to be done — abuses to be abolished, houses to be made habitable, burdens to be lifted from shoulders unable to carry them. There was also land the yield from which could be increased by a very moderate expenditure. She would enjoy the power to do these things which the man's demand for help offered

her, but she was more stirred by his desire to redeem past neglect and set right his failures.

"Well," she promised, "you shall have my candid advice whenever you need it."

He showed his gratitude, but he was conscious of a satisfaction that had no connection with the welfare of his estate. He would have a legitimate excuse for seeing her often; the work jointly undertaken would lead to a closer confidence. He had always cherished a certain tenderness for her; he must marry somebody with money before long; and though Millicent's means were not so large as Bella's, they were not contemptible. He had not the honesty to let these thoughts obtrude themselves, but they nevertheless hovered at the back of his mind. It was more graceful to reflect that Millicent possessed refinement, a degree of beauty, and many most desirable qualities.

CHAPTER XX

MRS. GLADWYNE'S TEMPTATION

CLARENCE had gone away with Batley when Lisle called on Mrs. Gladwyne. She was leaving home for a visit on the following day and he wished to say good-by, and, if an opportunity offered, to ask her opinion upon a matter he had at heart. She was not a clever woman, but there were points on which he thought her judgment could be trusted. He was told that she would be occupied for a few minutes and was shown into her drawing-room. He sat down to wait and, though he was familiar with the house, he looked about him with an interest for which there was a reason. The room had always impressed him by its size and loftiness, and it did so more than ever that afternoon.

The floor was of hardwood, polished to a glossy luster by the hands of several generations, and the rugs scattered here and there emphasized its extent. Most of the furniture was old, and the few articles apparently bought in later times harmonized with it. The faded ceiling had been painted with Cupid's trailing ribands, he judged by some artist of the period shortly preceding the French Revolution, and two or three Arcadian figures hinted at the same date. There were other things — a luster chandelier, quaintly-wrought hearth-irons, a carved wood mantel — that pointed to bygone days.

It all impressed him with a sense of the continuity of English traditions and mode of life, as applied to such families as the Gladwynes. Cradled in a degree of luxury which nevertheless differed from modern profusion and ostentation, steeped in a slightly austere refinement, he could understand their shrinking from sudden chance and clinging to the customs of the past. They were all, so far as he had seen, characterized by the possession of high qualities, with the exception of Clarence, whom he regarded as a reversion to a baser type; but he thought that they would suffer if uprooted and transplanted in a less sheltered and less cultivated soil. Inherited instincts were difficult to subdue; he was conscious of their influence. He came from a new land where he had often toiled for a dollar or two daily, but a love and veneration for the ancient English homes in which his people had lived was growing strong in him.

Mrs. Gladwyne did not appear, but he had a good deal to think of and was content to wait. He had grown fond of the stately lady and it was, indeed, largely for her sake that he had decided not to reveal for a while what he knew about the tragedy in British Columbia. He could not absolutely prove his version of the affair, and it would bring distress upon the mother of the offender; he had already waited two years and, though he felt that his dead comrade had a strong claim on him, he could wait a little longer. Fate might place conclusive evidence in his hands or remove some of his difficulties. Besides, he must go back as soon as possible to the Canadian North, and in one respect he was very loath to do this.

At last he heard a footstep and his hostess came in.

Her dress was not of the latest fashion, but it somehow struck him as out of place; she ought to have been attired in the mode of a century ago, with powder in her hair. Nevertheless, fragile as she was, with her fine carriage and her gracious smile, she made an attractive picture in the ancient room.

"I've come on an unpleasant errand — to say good-by — and to thank you for many favors shown to a stranger," he said.

"I think you were never that from the beginning," she told him. "By and by we learned the reason — you really belong to us."

He made a gesture of humorous expostulation.

"I like to believe that I belong here, but not because of the explanation you give. It doesn't seem to be much to my credit that my forefathers lived in this part of the country; I'd rather be taken on my actual merits, if that isn't too egotistical."

"They did live here," she rejoined. "You can't get over that — it has its influence."

It was the point of view he had expected her to take.

"We are very sorry you are going," she continued; "somehow we hardly anticipated it. Have you ever thought of coming back for good?"

She was unconsciously giving him the lead he desired, but he would not seize it precipitately; he was half afraid.

"No," he answered, smiling; "my work's out yonder. I couldn't sit idle. I think Miss Gladwyne hit it when she told me that I was one of the pioneers."

His hostess showed more comprehension than he had looked for.

"Yes; I set you down as one of the men who prefer heat and cold, want of food, and toil, to the comforts they could have at home. I have met a few, sons of my old friends, and heard of others. After all, we have a good many of them in England."

"Troublesome people, aren't they? What do you do with them?"

"Let them go. How do we rule India and hold so much of Africa? How did we open up Canada for you?"

He nodded.

"That's right. It doesn't matter that in respect to Canada the sons of Highland peasants did their share; the Hudson Bay people and the Laurentian Frenchmen showed us the way. We found out what kind of men they were when we went in after them."

There was silence for a few moments and he glanced at her with admiration. The honorable pride of caste she had shown strongly appealed to him. She stood for all that was fine in the old régime, and once more he wondered how such a woman could have borne such a son.

"I'm returning because business calls," he explained. "My means won't keep me in idleness, and that fact has a bearing on the question as to whether I'll ever come back again. It's a very momentous one to me."

She waited, noticing with some surprise the sudden tenseness of his expression, until he spoke again, hesitatingly.

"You are the only person I can come to for advice. I'd be grateful for your opinion."

"I'll try to give it carefully," she promised.

"Well," he said, "the life you people lead here has its attractions; they must be strong to you. It would be hard to break with all its associations, to face one that was new and different; I mean for a woman to do so?"

"Ah!" she exclaimed, seeing the drift of his remarks at last. "You had better tell me whom you are thinking of."

"Millicent."

She started. This was a painful surprise, though she now wondered why she had never suspected it. He had met the girl frequently before his accident, and she had since gone over to Nasmyth's to talk with him now and then; yet, for some not very obvious reason, nobody seemed to have contemplated the possibility of his falling in love with her. Mrs. Gladwyne had undoubtedly not done so, and she was filled with alarm. It was most desirable that Millicent should marry Clarence.

"How long have you had this in your mind?" she asked.

"That is more than I can tell you," he answered thoughtfully. "I admired her greatly the first time I saw her; I admired her more when we made friends, but I don't think I went much farther for a while. In fact, I believe it was only when I knew I must go back soon that I realized how strong a hold she had on me, and then I fought against yielding. The difficulties to be got over looked so serious."

"Has Millicent any suspicion of your regard for her?" It was an important question and Mrs. Gladwyne waited in suspense for his reply.

"Not the slightest, so far as I can tell. I tried

to hide my feelings until I could come to a decision as to what I ought to do."

This was satisfactory, provided that his supposition was correct, and his companion could imagine his exercising a good deal of self-repression.

"What is your fear?" she asked.

"Well, I'm rough and unpolished compared with Nasmyth and the rest, but with her large mind she might overlook that. I couldn't live here as Nasmyth and Clarence do; I'm not rich enough. My wife, if I marry, must come out West with me, and I might have to be away from her for months now and then. I don't know that I could even establish myself in Victoria, where she would find something resembling your English society. Besides, my small share of prosperity might come to an end; I'm going back now, sooner than I expected, because there are business difficulties to be grappled with."

Mrs. Gladwyne nodded. She could follow his thought, but after a pause he continued.

"What troubles me most is that Millicent seems so much in harmony with her surroundings. We have nothing like them in Canada — anyway, not in the West. Whether ours are better or worse doesn't affect the case; they're widely different. There is much she would have to give up; what I could offer her in place of it would be new and strange, less finished, less refined. Could a woman of your station stand it? Would she suffer from being torn adrift from the associations that surround her here?"

His companion considered. Allowing for his generosity in thinking first of Millicent, he was a little too practical and dispassionate. She did not think he was

very greatly in love with the girl as yet, and that was consoling. What Millicent thought she did not know, but in many respects the man was eminently likable. Mrs. Gladwyne had grown fond of him; but that must not be allowed to stand in her son's way. Clarence came before anybody else.

"I feel my responsibility," she said slowly. "Would you act on my advice?"

"I think so — it might be hard. Anyway, I'd try."

She hesitated. The man had won her respect. Had she been wholly free from extraneous influences she might, perhaps, have counseled him to make the venture, but half-consciously she tried to see only the shadows in the picture he had drawn.

"Well," she answered him, "until two years ago Millicent lived in this house — that must have had its effect on her."

"Yes," he agreed; "she shows it. These old places set their stamp on people — it's very plain on you."

Mrs. Gladwyne saw that he understood, but she felt half guilty as she proceeded:

"You admit that you could not give her anything of this kind in Canada?"

He laughed rather grimly.

"No; our homes were built yesterday, and we move on rapidly — they'll be pulled down again to-morrow. I'll own that our ideas and manners are in the same unfinished, transitory stage. We haven't been able to sit down and learn how to be graceful."

She made a sign of comprehension, though her reluctance to proceed grew stronger. He was very honest and there was pain in his face.

"Millicent," she said, "is essentially one of us, used to what we consider needful, bred to our ways. The endless small amenities which make life smooth here have always surrounded her. Can you imagine her, for instance, living with the Marples?"

"No," he replied harshly; "I can't."

"Then do you think it would be wise to take her to Canada?"

"I have thought she would not mind giving up many things she values, if one could win her affection."

"That is very true; but it doesn't get over the difficulty. It isn't so very hard to nerve oneself to make a sacrifice, it's the facing of the inevitable results when the reaction sets in that tells. She would continually miss something she had been used to and she would long for it."

He sat silent for nearly a minute, with his face set hard, and then he looked up.

"If Millicent were your daughter, would you let her go?"

Again Mrs. Gladwyne hesitated. His confidence hurt her; she shrank from delivering what she thought would be the final blow, but she strove to assure herself that she was acting in Millicent's best interest.

"No," she answered, "not unless she was passionately attached to the man who wished to take her out, and then I should do my utmost to dissuade her."

He made no answer for a few moments. Then slowly he rose.

"Thank you," he said gravely. "I'm afraid you're right. It's generally hard to do what one

ought. Well,"— he took the hand she held out — "I'm grateful to you in many ways and I'd like you to remember me now and then."

She let him go, and crossing the room to a window, she watched him stride down the drive with a swift, determined gait. He might be tried severely, but there was little fear of this man's resolution deserting him. She was, however, troubled by a recurrence of the unpleasant sense of guilt when he disappeared; it was difficult to persuade herself that she had been quite honest, and the difficulty was new to her.

In the meanwhile Lisle walked on rapidly, disregarding the ache that the motion started in his injured arm and shoulder. In his dejected mood, the twinge at every step was something of a welcome distraction. Since a sacrifice must be made, it should, he resolved, be made by him; Millicent should not suffer, though he admitted that he had no reason for supposing that she would have been willing to do so. She had never shown him more than confidence and friendliness, and it was only during the past few weeks that he had ventured to think of the possibility of winning her. Even then, the thought had roused no excess of ardent passion; much as he desired her, a strong respect and steadfast affection were more in keeping with his temperament. Nevertheless, had he known that she loved him and he could confer benefits upon her in place of demanding a sacrifice, he would have been strangely hard to deter.

On his return, Nasmyth met him at the door.

"Where have you been?" he asked with some indignation.

"To Mrs. Gladwyne's," Lisle informed him.

"You walked to the house, after what Irvine said when you insisted on his taking the bandages off?"

"I took them off; he only protested. Anyway, I didn't break my leg."

Nasmyth noticed his gloomy expression.

"Well," he responded, "I suppose there was very little use in warning you to keep quiet; but you look as if you had suffered for your rashness."

"That's true," answered the Canadian with a grim smile. "After all, it's what usually happens, isn't it?"

They went in, Nasmyth a little puzzled by his companion's manner; but Lisle offered no explanation of its cause.

CHAPTER XXI

THE LAST AFTERNOON

IT was a bright day when Lisle took his leave of the Marples. They gave him a friendly farewell and when he turned away Bella Crestwick walked with him down the drive.

"I don't care what they think; I couldn't talk to you while they were all trying to say something nice," she explained. "Still, to do them justice, I believe they meant it. We are sorry to part with you."

"It's soothing to feel that," Lisle replied. "In many ways, I'm sorry to go. I've no doubt you'll miss your brother after to-morrow."

"Yes," she said with unusual seriousness. "More than once during the last two years I felt that it would be a relief to let somebody else have the responsibility of looking after him, but now that the time has come I'm sorry he's going. I can't help remembering how often I lost my temper, and the mistakes I made."

"You stuck to your task," commended Lisle. "I dare say it was a hard one, almost beyond you now and then."

He knew that he was not exaggerating. She was only a year older than the wilful lad, who must at times have driven her to despair. Yet she had never faltered in her efforts to restrain and control him; and had made a greater sacrifice for his sake than Lisle

suspected, though in the light of a subsequent revelation of Gladwyne's character she was thankful for this.

"Well," she replied, "I suppose that one misses a load one has grown used to, and I feel very downcast. It's hardly fair to pass Jim on to you — but I can trust you to take care of him."

"You can trust the work and the country," Lisle corrected her with a trace of grimness. "He's not going out to be idle, as he'll discover. There's nothing like short commons and steady toil for taming any one. You'll see the effect of my prescription when I send him back again."

"He has physical pluck. I'm glad to remember it; and he has shown signs of steadying since he found Gladwyne out."

Lisle looked at her searchingly.

"Since he found Gladwyne out?"

"Oh," she answered, seeing that she had been incautious, "he rather idolized the man, and I suppose it was painful to discover by accident that he wasn't quite all he thought him. Now, however, he has transferred his homage to you — I'm afraid Jim must always have somebody to prop him — but I've no misgivings."

Lisle laughed.

"I've seldom had the time to get into mischief; I suppose that accounts for a good deal."

They were nearing the lodge and she stopped and held out her hand.

"It's hard to say good-by; you have helped me more than you'll ever guess, and you won't be forgotten." Then as he held her hand with signs of embarrassment she laughed with something of her usual mocking man-

ner and suddenly drew away. "Good-by," she added. "I was rather daring once and I suppose you were shocked. I can't repeat the rashness — it would mean more now."

She walked back toward the house, and he went on. Half an hour later he met Millicent, who stopped to greet him.

"I was on my way to call on you for the last time," he told her.

There was something in his voice that troubled her, and, though she had expected it, she shrank from the intimation of his departure.

"Then, will you come back with me?" she asked.

"If you're not pressed for time, I'd rather walk across the moor, the way you once took me soon after I came. I'd like to look round the countryside again before I leave, though it will be a melancholy pleasure."

For no very obvious reason, she hesitated. It was, however, hard to refuse his last request and she really wished to go.

"The views are unusually good," she said, as they started on. "Wouldn't Nasmyth have gone with you?"

"It wouldn't have been the same," he explained. "I'm storing up memories to take away with me and somehow Nasmyth is most clearly associated with Canada. When I think of him, it will be as sitting in camp beside a portage or holding the canoe paddle."

"And you can't picture my being occupied in that way?"

"No," he answered gravely; "I associate you with England — with stately old houses, with well-cared-for

woods and quiet valleys. There's no doubt that your place is here."

He spoke as if he were making an admission that was forced from him, and she endeavored to answer in a lighter manner.

"It's the only one I've had an opportunity for trying."

"But you love this place!"

"Yes," she said; "I love it very well. Perhaps I am prejudiced, and I've only had a glimpse at other countries, but I feel that this is the most beautiful land in the world."

He stopped and glanced round. From where they stood he could look out upon leagues of lonely brown moors running back into the distance under a cloudless sky. Beyond them the Scottish hills were softly penciled in delicate gray. There was a sense of space and vastness in the picture, but it was not that which spoke most plainly to him. Down on the far-spread low ground lay such white homesteads, built to stand for generations, as he had never seen in Canada; parks sprinkled with noble trees, amid which the gray walls of some ancient home peeped out; plantations made with loving care, field on field, fenced in with well-trimmed hedges.

It was all eloquent of order, security and long-established ease; a strong contrast to the rugged wilderness where, in the bush and on treeless prairie, men never relaxed their battle with nature. In many ways, his was a stern country; a land of unremitting toil from which one desisted only long enough to eat and sleep, and he was one of the workers. Mrs. Gladwyne had been right — it was no place for this delicately

nurtured girl with her sensitiveness and artistic faculties.

"For those who can live as you live, it would be hard to find the equal of this part of England," he said. "But I'm not sure you can keep it very much longer as it is."

"Why?" she asked.

It was a relief to talk of matters of minor interest, for he dare not let his thoughts dwell too much on the subject that was nearest them.

"Well," he replied, "there's the economic pressure, for one thing; the growth of your cities; the demand for food. I see land lying almost idle that could be made productive at a very moderate outlay. Our people often give nearly as much as it's worth here for no better soil."

"But how do they make it pay?"

He laughed.

"The secret is that they expect very little — enough to eat, a shack they build with their own hands to sleep in — and they're willing to work sixteen hours out of the twenty-four."

"They can't do so in winter."

"The hours are shorter, but where the winter's hardest — on the open middle prairie — the work's more severe. There the little man spends a good deal of his time hauling home stove-wood or building-logs for new stables or barns. He has often to drive several leagues with the thermometer well below zero before he can find a bluff with large enough trees. In the Pacific Slope forests, where it's warmer, work goes on much as usual. The bush rancher spends his days chopping big trees in the rain and his nights making

odd things — furniture, wagon-poles, new doors for his outbuildings. What you would call necessary leisure is unknown."

This was not exaggeration; but he spoke of it from a desire to support his resolution by emphasizing the sternest aspects of western life. It had others more alluring: there were men who dwelt more or less at their ease; but they were by no means numerous, and the toilers — in city office, lonely bush, or sawmill — were consumed by or driven into a feverish activity. As one of them, it was his manifest duty to leave this English girl in her sheltered surroundings. There was, however, one remote but alluring possibility that made this a little easier — he might, after all, win enough to surround her with some luxury and cultured friends in one of the cities of the Pacific coast. Though they differed from those in England, they were beautiful, with their vistas of snow-capped mountains and the sea.

"But you are not a farmer," she objected.

"No; mining's my vocation and it keeps me busy. In the city, I'm at work long before they think of opening their London offices, and it's generally midnight before I've finished worrying engineers and contractors at their homes or hotels. In the wilds, we're more or less continuously grappling with rock or treacherous gravel, or out on the prospecting trail, while the northern summer lasts; it's then light most of the night. In the winter, we sometimes sleep in the snow, with the thermometer near the bottom of its register."

Millicent shivered a little, wondering uneasily why

he had taken the trouble to impress this upon her. It was, she thought, certainly not to show what he was capable of.

"Are you glad to go back, or do you dread it?" she asked.

"I don't dread it — it's my life, and things may be easier by and by. Still, I'm very loath to go."

Millicent could believe that. His troubled expression confirmed it; and she was strangely pleased. She had never had a companion in whom she could have so much confidence, and she had already recognized that she was, in one sense of the word, growing fond of him. Indeed, she had begun to be curious about the feeling and to wonder whether it stopped quite short at liking.

"Well," she told him, "I'm glad that you asked me to come with you. I think I was one of your first friends and I'm pleased that you should wish to spend part of your last day in my company."

"You come first of all!"

"That's flattering," she smiled. "What about Nasmyth?"

"An unusually fine man, but he has his limits. You have none."

"I'm not sure I quite understand you."

"Then," he explained seriously, "what I think I mean is this — you're one of the people who somehow contrive to meet any call that is made on them. You would never sit down, helpless, in a trying situation; you'd find some way of getting over the difficulties. It's a gift more useful than genius."

"You're rating me too highly," she answered with

some embarrassment. "You admitted that you thought my place was here — the inference was that I shouldn't fit into a different one."

"No," he corrected her; "you'd adapt yourself to changed conditions; but that wouldn't prevent your suffering in the process. Indeed, I think people of your kind often suffer more than the others."

He was to some extent correct in his estimate of her, but she shrank from the direct personal application of his remarks.

"Aren't the virtues you have described fairly common?" she asked. "I think that must be so, because they're so necessary."

"In a degree, I suppose they are. You see them, perhaps, most clearly in such lands as mine. The pioneer has a good deal against him — frost and floods, hard rock and sliding snow; he must face every discomfort, hunger and stinging cold. The prospector crawls through tangled forests, and packs his stores across snowy divides; shallow shafts cave in, rude dams are swept away. A man worked to exhaustion on the trail runs out of provisions and goes on, starving; he lames himself among the rocks, sets his teeth and limps ahead. I've thought the capacity to do so is humanity's greatest attribute, but after all it's not shown in its finest light battling with material things. When the moral stress comes, the man who would face the other often fails."

"Yes," she asserted; "there are barriers that can't be stormed. Merely to acquiesce is the hardest thing of all, but in that lies the victory."

"It's a bitter one," he answered moodily.

There was silence for a few minutes while they

strolled on through the heather. Afterward, Millicent understood where his thoughts had led, but now she was chiefly conscious of a slight but perplexing resentment against the fact that he should discourse rather crude philosophy. Indeed, the feeling almost amounted to disappointment — it was their last walk, and though she did not know what she had expected from him, it was something different from this. Walking by her side, with his fine poise, his keen eyes that regarded her steadily when she spoke, and his resolute brown face, he appealed to her physically, and in other ways she approved of him. It was borne in upon her more clearly that she would miss him badly, and she suspected that he would not find it easy to part from her. In the meanwhile he recognized that she had, no doubt unconsciously, given him a hint — when the moral difficulties were unsurmountable one must quietly submit.

They stopped when they reached the highest strip of moor. The sun was low, the vast sweep of country beneath them was fading to neutral color, woods, low ridges, and river valleys losing their sharpness of contour as the light left them. A faint cold wind sighed among the heather, emphasizing the desolation of the moorland.

Millicent shivered.

"We'll go down," Lisle said quietly; "the brightness has gone. I've had a great time here — something to think of as long as I live — but now it's over."

"But you'll come back some day?" she suggested.

"I may; I can't tell," he answered. "I've schemes in view, to be worked out in the North, that may make my return possible; but even then it couldn't be quite

the same. Things change; one mustn't expect too much."

His smile was a little forced; his mood was infectious, and an unusual melancholy seized upon Millicent as they moved down-hill across the long, sad-colored slopes of heather. Then they reached a bare wood where dead leaves that rustled in the rising wind lay in drifts among the withered fern and the slender birch trunks rose about them somberly. The light had almost gone, the gathering gloom reacted upon both of them, and there was in the girl's mind a sense of something left unsaid. Once or twice she glanced at her companion; his face was graver than usual and he did not look at her.

It was quite dark when they walked down the dale beneath the leafless oaks, talking now with an effort about indifferent matters, until at last Millicent stopped at the gate of the drive to her house.

"Will you come in?" she asked.

"No; Nasmyth's waiting. I'm glad you came with me, but I won't say good-by. I'll look forward to the journey we're to make together through British Columbia."

She held out her hand; in another moment he turned away, and she walked on to the house with a strange sense of depression.

CHAPTER XXII

STARTLING NEWS

IT was snowing in the northern wilderness and the bitter air was filled with small, dry flakes, which whirled in filmy clouds athwart the red glow of a fire. A clump of boulders stood outlined beside a frozen river, and behind the boulders a growth of willows rose crusted with snow, while beyond them, barely distinguishable, were the stunted shapes of a few birches. So far the uncertain radiance reached when the fire leaped up, but outside it all was shut in by a dense curtain of falling snow.

It had been dark for some time, and Lisle was getting anxious as he lay, wrapped in a ragged skin coat, in a hollow beside a boulder. A straining tent stood near the fire, but the big stone afforded better shelter, and drawing hard upon his pipe, he listened eagerly. The effort to do so was unpleasant as well as somewhat risky, for he had to turn back the old fur cap from his tingling ears; and he shivered at every variation of the stinging blast. There was nothing to be heard except the soft swish of the snow as it swirled among the stones and the hollow rumble of the river pouring down a rapid beneath a rent bridge of ice.

The man had spent the early winter, when the snow facilitates traveling, in the auriferous regions of the North, arranging for the further development of the

mineral properties under his control. That done, he had, returning some distance south, struck out again into the wilds to examine some alluvial claims in which he had been asked to take an interest. It was difficult to reach the first of them; and then he had spent several weeks in determined toil, cutting and hauling in wood to thaw out the frozen surface sufficiently to make investigations. Crestwick had accompanied him, but during the last few days he had gone down to a Hudson Bay post with the owners of the claim, who were returning satisfied with the arrangements made. His object was to obtain any letters that might have arrived, and Lisle, going on to look at another group of claims, had arranged to meet him where he had camped.

It would be difficult to miss the way, for it consisted of the frozen river, but Crestwick should have arrived early in the afternoon and Lisle felt uneasy. On the whole, the Canadian was satisfied with the conduct of his companion. Deprived during most of the time of any opportunity for dissipation, scantily fed, and forced to take his share in continuous labor, the lad's better qualities had become manifest and he had responded pluckily to the demands on him. Abstinence and toil were already producing their refining effect. Still, he had not come back, and with the snow thickening, it was possible that he might not be able to keep to the comparatively plain track of the river. There was also the risk that by holding on too far when he saw the fire he might blunder in among the fissured ice at the foot of the rapid.

Rising at length, Lisle walked toward the dangerous spot, guiding himself by sound, for once he was out

of the firelight there was nothing to be seen but a white driving cloud. He knew when he had reached the neighborhood of the rapid by the increased clamor of the stream, and he crept on until he decided that he was abreast of the pool below. The rapid was partly frozen, but the ice was fissured and piled up at the tail of it.

Lisle could not remember how long he waited, beating his stiffened hands and stumbling to and fro to keep his feet from freezing, but at last, though he could see nothing, he heard a crunching sound, and he called out sharply.

"I've got here!" came the answer. "Where shall I leave the ice? Seems to be an opening in front of me!"

It was difficult to hear through the clamor of the water and the crash of drifting ice; but Lisle caught the words and called again:

"Turn your back on the wind and walk straight ahead!"

He supposed that Crestwick was obeying him, but a few moments later he heard a second shout:

"Brought up by another big crack!"

The voice was hoarse and anxious, and Lisle, deciding that the lad was worn out by his journey and probably confused, bade him wait, and hurrying down-stream a little he moved out upon the frozen pool. He proceeded along it for a few minutes, calling to Crestwick and guiding himself by the answers; and then he stopped abruptly with a strip of black water close beneath his feet. On the other side was a ridge of rugged ice; but what lay beyond it he could not see.

"I'm in among a maze of cracks; can't find any way out!" Crestwick cried, answering his hail.

Lisle reflected rapidly as he followed up the crevasse, which showed no sign of narrowing. The snow was thick, the bitter wind increasing, and a plunge into icy water might prove disastrous. It was obvious that he must extricate his companion as soon as possible, but the means of accomplishing it was not clear. Crestwick was somewhere on the wrong side of the crack, which seemed to lead right across the stream toward the confusion of broken ridges and hummocks which, as Lisle remembered, fringed the opposite bank. He must endeavor to find the place where the lad had got across; but this was difficult, for fresh breaches and ridges drove him back from the edge. Presently the chasm ended in a wide opening filled with an inky flood, and Lisle, turning back a yard or two, braced himself and jumped.

He made out a shapeless white object ahead, and coming to another crack he scrambled to the top of an ice-block and leaped again. There was a sharp crackle when he came down, the piece he alighted on rocked, and Crestwick staggered.

"Look out!" he cried. "It's tilting under!"

Lisle saw water lapping in upon the snow, but it flowed back, and the cake he had detached impinged upon the rest with a crash.

"Come on!" he shouted. "The stream will jamb it fast!"

They reached the larger mass and moved across it, but Lisle, clutching his companion's arm, bewildered and almost blinded by the snow, doubted if he were retracing his steps. He did not remember some of the

ridges and ragged blocks over which they stumbled, and the smaller rents seemed more numerous. It was evident that Crestwick was badly worn out and they must endeavor to reach the bank with as little delay as possible.

At last they came to the broad crevasse, farther up the stream, and Lisle turned to Crestwick.

"Better take off your skin-coat. You'll have to jump."

"I can't," said the other dejectedly. "It's not nerve — the thing's clean beyond me."

His slack pose — for he was dimly visible amid the haze of driving snow — bore out his words. The long march he had made had brought him to the verge of exhaustion; his overtaxed muscles would respond to no further call on them. For a moment or two Lisle stood gazing at the dark water in the gap.

"Then we'll look for a narrower place," he decided. "Where did you get across?"

"I don't know. Don't remember this split, but the ice was working under me. Perhaps the snow had covered it and now it's fallen in."

They scrambled forward, following the crevasse, but could find no means of passing it and now and then the ice trembled ominously. At last, when the opposite side projected a little, Lisle suddenly sprang out from the edge and alighted safely.

"It's easy!" he called, stripping off his long skin coat and flinging one end of it across the chasm to Crestwick. "Get hold and face the jump!"

It was not a time for hesitation; the exhausted lad dare not contemplate the gap, lest his courage fail him, and nerving himself for an effort, he leaped. Strik-

ing the edge on the other side, he plunged forward as Lisle dragged at the coat, and then rolled over in the snow. He was up in a moment, gasping hard, almost astonished to find himself in security, and Lisle led him back to the snow-covered shingle.

"It strikes me as fortunate that I came to look for you," he observed. "You'd probably have ended by walking into the river."

"Thanks," said Crestwick simply. "It isn't the first hole you've pulled me out of."

They reached the camp and the lad, shaking the snow off his furs, sat down wearily on a few branches laid close to the sheltering boulder, while Lisle took a frying-pan and kettle off the fire, and afterward filled his pipe again and watched his companion while he ate. Crestwick had changed since he left England; his face was thinner, and the hint of sensuality and empty self-assurance had faded out of it. His eyes were less bold, but they were steadier; and, sitting in the firelight, clad in dilapidated furs, he looked somehow more refined than he had done in evening dress in Marple's billiard-room. When he spoke, as he did at intervals, the confident tone which had once characterized him was no longer evident. He had learned to place a juster estimate upon his value in the icy North.

"I was uncommonly glad to see the fire," he said at length. "Another mile or two would have beaten me; though I spent nearly twice as long in coming up from the Forks as the prospectors said it would take. I was going light, too."

"They've been doing this kind of thing most of their lives. You couldn't expect to equal them. Where did you sleep last night?"

"In some withered stuff among a clump of willows; I scraped the snow off it. That is, I lay down there, but as the fire wouldn't burn well, I don't think I got much rest. Part of the time I wondered what I was staying in this country for. I didn't seem to find any sensible answer."

"You could get out of it when the freighters go down with the dogs and sledges," Lisle suggested. "It would be a good deal more comfortable at Marple's, for instance."

"Do you want to get rid of me? I suppose I'm not much help."

"Oh, no!" Lisle assured him. "It only struck me that you might find the novelty of the experience wearing off. Besides, you're improving; in a year or two you'll make quite a reliable prospector's packer."

"That's something," replied Crestwick, grinning. "Not long ago I thought I'd make a sportsman; one of Gladwyne's kind. The ambition doesn't so much appeal to me now. But I want to be rather more than a looker-on. Can't you let me put something into one of these claims?"

"Not a cent! In the first place, you'd have some trouble in raising the money; in the second, I might be accused of playing Batley's game."

"The last's ridiculous. But if I'm not to do anything, it brings me back to the question — why am I staying here?"

"I can't tell you that. I'll only suggest that if you hold out until you come into your property, you'll go back much more fit in several ways to look after it. I should imagine you'd find less occasion to emulate

people like Batley and Gladwyne then. Of course, I don't know if that's worth waiting for."

It was the nearest approach to seriousness he considered advisable, for precept was obnoxious to him and apt to be resented by his companion.

"Now," he added, "what about the mail?"

Crestwick produced a packet of letters which he had not opened yet and Lisle glanced at two business communications. The boulder kept off most of the snow, and the glare of the snapping branches, rising and falling with the gusts, supplied sufficient light.

"Mine's from Bella; there's news in it," Crestwick remarked. "She says Carew — I don't think you've seen him — is anxious to marry her, and if she's convinced that I'm getting on satisfactorily, she'll probably agree. He's — I'm quoting — about as good as she's likely to get; that's Bella all over."

"What's he like?" Lisle asked with interest.

"To tell the truth, in one way I think she's right — the man's straight; not the Marple crowd's style. In fact, I found him decidedly stand-offish, though I'll own there might have been a reason for that. Anyhow, I'm glad; she might have done a good deal worse. I suppose you won't mind giving me a testimonial that will set her doubts at rest?"

"You shall have it. Since the man's a good one, I'm nearly as glad as you are. I've a strong respect for your sister; she stood by you pluckily."

"That's true," asserted Crestwick. "I was a bit of an imbecile, and she's really hard to beat. She says if the life here's too tough for me I'm to come back and live with them. That's considerate, because in a way she can't want me, though I haven't the least doubt

she'd make Carew put up with my company. It decides the question — I'm not going."

"A little while ago you'd have taken Carew's delight for granted, wouldn't you?"

"I'm beginning to see things," Crestwick answered with a wave of his hand. Then he paused and looked confused. "After all, though she says I'm to give you the message, Bella really goes too far now and then."

"She doesn't always mean it. You may as well obey her."

"It's this — if it's any consolation, she has no intention of forgetting you, and Arthur — that's the fellow's name — is anxious to make your acquaintance. She says there are men who're not so unresponsive as you are, but Arthur has never been into the North to get frozen."

Lisle laughed — it was so characteristic of Bella.

"Here's something else," Crestwick proceeded; "about Miss Gladwyne. Bella thinks you'd be interested to hear that there's a prospect of —"

"Go on!" cried Lisle, dropping his pipe.

"I can't see," said Crestwick. "You might stir the fire."

Lisle threw on some fresh wood and poked the fire savagely with a branch, and the lad continued, reading with difficulty while the pungent smoke obscured the light.

"It seems that she saw Gladwyne and his mother and Millicent together in town, and she afterward spent a week with Flo Marple at somebody's house. Flo told her that it looks as if the long-deferred arrangement was to be brought about at last." He laid

down the letter. "If that means she's to marry Gladwyne, it ought to be prevented!"

They looked at each other curiously, and Lisle, struggling to command himself, noticed the lad's strained expression.

"Why?" he asked with significant shortness.

Crestwick seemed on the verge of some vehement outbreak and Lisle saw that it was with an effort he refrained.

"Oh, well," he answered, "the man's not half good enough. He's a dangerous rotter."

"Dangerous?"

"Yes," returned Crestwick dryly; "I think that describes it."

There was an impressive silence, while each wondered how far he might have betrayed himself. Then Lisle spoke.

"Read the rest of the letter. See if Bella says anything further."

"No announcement made," Crestwick informed him a little later. "All the same, Flo's satisfied that the engagement will be made known before long." He looked up at Lisle with uncertainty and anger in his face. "It almost makes me forget Bella's other news. What can be done?"

"What do you want to do?"

"Don't fence!" said Crestwick. "I'm not smart at it. Don't you know a reason why Miss Gladwyne shouldn't marry the fellow?"

"Yes. It has nothing to do with you."

"Perhaps not," replied Crestwick. "I can only say that the match ought to be broken off. It isn't to be contemplated!"

"Well," Lisle responded with forced quietness, "if it's any relief to you, I'll write to Nasmyth the first chance I get, asking what he's heard. Now we'll drop the subject. Is there anything else of general interest in your letter?"

"Bella says her wedding won't be until the early summer and she's thinking of making Carew bring her out to Banff or Glacier — he came out shooting or climbing once before. Then she'll endeavor to look us up."

He lighted his pipe and they sat in silence for a while. Then Crestwick rose and bringing a blanket from the tent wrapped it about him and lay down in the lee of the boulder near the fire. A few minutes later he was sound asleep; but Lisle sat long awake, thinking hard, while the snow drove by above him.

CHAPTER XXIII

A FORCED MARCH

WHEN Crestwick awakened, very cold, and cramped, a little before daylight the next morning, it was still snowing, but Lisle was up and busy preparing breakfast.

"That looks like marching; I thought we were going to lie off to-day," observed the lad.

"How do you feel?" Lisle inquired.

"Horribly stiff; but that's the worst. Why are you going on?"

"Because the freighters should leave the Hudson Bay post to-morrow with their dog-teams. It's the only chance of sending out a letter I may get for a long while, and I want to write to Nasmyth."

Crestwick shivered, glancing disconsolately at the snow; he shrank from the prospect of a two days' hurried march. Had Lisle suggested this when he first came out, the lad would have rebelled, but by degrees the stern discipline of the wilds had had its effect on him. He was learning that the weariness of the flesh must be disregarded when it is necessary that anything shall be done.

"Oh, well," he acquiesced, "I'll try to make it. If I can't, you'll have to drop me where there's some shelter."

He ate the best possible breakfast, for as wood was scarce in parts of the country, and making a fire dif-

ficult, it was very uncertain when he would get another meal. Then he slipped the pack-straps over his stiff shoulders, and got ready to start with a burden he did not think he would have been capable of carrying for a couple of hours when he left England.

"Now we'll pull out," he said. "But wait a moment: I'd better look for a dry place to put this paper currency."

"Where did you get it? You told me at the last settlement that you had hardly a dollar left."

Crestwick grinned.

"Oh, some of the boys offered to teach me a little game they were playing when we thawed out that claim. I didn't find it difficult, though I must own that I had very good luck. It was three or four months since I'd touched a card, and there's a risk of reaction in too drastic reform. Anyhow, I'm glad I saw that game; one fellow had a way of handling trumps that almost took me in. If I can remember, it should come in useful."

Lisle made no comment; restraint, he thought, was likely to prove more effective if it were not continually exercised. They started and for several hours plodded up the white highway of the river, leaving it only for a while when the ice grew fissured where the current ran more swiftly. White hills rose above them, relieved here and there by a somber clump of cedars or leafless willows and birches in a ravine. The snow crunched beneath their feet, and scattered in a fine white powder when they broke the crust; more of it fell at intervals, but blew away again; and they held on with a nipping wind in their faces and a low gray sky hanging over them.

Lisle, however, noticed little; he pushed forward with a steady and apparently tireless stride, thinking bitterly. Since his return to Canada, his mind had dwelt more or less continuously on Millicent. He recognized that in leaving her with his regard for her undeclared he had been sustained by the possibility that he might by determined effort achieve such a success as would enable him to return and in claiming her to offer most of the amenities of life to which she had been accustomed. Though it had not been easy, he had to some extent accomplished this. On reaching Victoria, he had found his business associates considering one or two bold and risky schemes for the extension of their mining interests, which he had carried out in the face of many difficulties. The new claims he had taken over promised a favorable yield upon development; he had arranged for the more profitable working of others by the aid of costly plant; and his affairs were generally prospering.

Then, when he was satisfied with the result of his exertions, Crestwick's news had struck him a crushing blow. He was wholly unprepared for it. Nasmyth had spoken of a match between Millicent and Gladwyne as probable, but the latter had devoted himself to Bella, who had openly encouraged him. The change in the girl's demeanor had escaped Lisle's notice, because he had been kept indoors by his injury. Now the success he had attained counted for almost nothing; he had nobody to share it with.

The subject, however, had another aspect; he could have borne the shock better had Millicent yielded to a worthy suitor, but it was unthinkable that she should marry Gladwyne. She must be saved from that at any

cost, though he thought her restored liberty would promise nothing to him. Even if her attachment to Gladwyne were free from passion, as Nasmyth had hinted, she must cherish some degree of affection and regard for the man. His desertion of her brother could not be forgiven, but the revelation of his baseness would not incline her favorably toward the person who made it, as it would seem to be merely for the purpose of separating her from him.

Lisle set his lips as he looked back on what he now considered his weakness in withholding the story of Gladwyne's treachery. Had he declared it at the beginning, Mrs. Gladwyne would have suffered no more than she must do, and it would have saved Millicent and himself from the pain that must fall upon them. He bitterly regretted that he had, for once, departed from his usual habit of simply and resolutely carrying out an obvious task without counting the cost. Still, he could write to Nasmyth, and to do that he must reach the Hudson Bay post on the morrow. He trudged on over the snow at a pace that kept Crestwick breathless.

The bitter wind chilled them through in spite of their exertion, and it had increased by noon, when Lisle halted for a minute or two to look about him.

They were in the bottom of a valley walled in by barren hills; the bank of the frozen river was marked out by snow-covered stones, but none of them was large enough to rest behind, and one could not face the wind, motionless, in the open. While he stood, a stinging icy powder lashed his cheeks, and his hands grew stiff in their mittens.

"There's not even a gulch we could sit down in," he

said. "We'll have to go on; and I'm not sorry, for one reason. There's not much time to spare."

Crestwick's eyes were smarting from the white glare; having started when weary from a previous journey, his legs and shoulders ached; but he had no choice between freezing and keeping himself slightly warm by steady walking. It would, he knew, be harder by and by, when his strength began to fail and the heat died out of his exhausted body.

"We'll have to find a shelter for the tent by nightfall, or dig a snowpit where there's some wood," he declared. "I'll try to hold out."

They proceeded and the afternoon's march tried him severely. Aching all over, breathing hard when they stumbled among the stones to skirt some half-frozen rapid, he labored on, regretting the comforts he had abandoned in England and yet not wholly sorry that he had done so. His moral fiber was toughening, for after all his faults were largely the result of circumstances and environment. Of no great intelligence, and imperfectly taught, he had been neglected by his penurious father who had been engaged in building up his commercial prosperity; his mother had died when he was young.

One of his marked failings was an inability to estimate the true value of things. He possessed something of the spirit of adventure and a desire to escape from the drab monotony of his early life, but these found expression in betting on the exploits of others on the football field and the turf, a haunting of the music-halls, and the cultivation of acquaintances on the lowest rung of the dramatic profession. All this offered him some glimpses of what he did not then perceive was

merely sham romance. Later when, on the death of his father, wealth had opened a wider field, deceived by surface appearances, he had made the same mistake, selecting wrong models and then chiefly copying their failings. Even his rather generous enthusiasm for those whom he admired had led him farther into error.

Now, however, his eyes had been partly opened. Thrown among men who pretended nothing, in a land where pretense is generally useless, he was learning to depreciate much that he had admired. Called upon to make the true adventure he had blindly sought for, he found that little counted except the elemental qualities of courage and steadfastness. Dear life was the stake in this game, and the prizes were greater things than a repute for cheap gallantry, and pieces of money; they were the subjugation of rock and river, the conversion of the wilderness to the use of man. Crestwick was growing in the light he gained, and in proof of it he stumbled forward, scourged by driving snow, throughout the bitter afternoon, although before the end of it he could scarcely lift his weary feet.

It was getting dark, when they found a few cedars clustered in the shelter of a crag, and Lisle set to work hewing off the lower branches and cutting knots of the resinous wood. Crestwick could not rouse himself to assist, and when the fire was kindled he lay beside it, shivering miserably.

"There's the kettle to be filled," suggested Lisle. "You could break the ice where the stream's faster among those stones; we'd boil water quicker than we'd melt down snow."

Crestwick got up with an effort that cost him a good deal and stumbled away from the fire. Then a gust of

wind met him, enveloping him in snow-dust and taking the power of motion momentarily away. He shook beneath his furs in the biting cold. Still, the river was near, and he moved on another few yards, when the kettle slipped from his stiffened hands and rolled down a steep slope. He stopped, wondering stupidly whether he could get down to recover it.

"Never mind; come back!" Lisle called to him. "I'll go for the thing."

The lad turned at the summons and sank down again beside the fire.

"I think I'm done," he said wearily. "I may feel a little more fit in the morning."

Lisle filled the kettle and prepared supper, and after eating voraciously, Crestwick lay down in the tent. It was in comparative shelter, but the frost grew more severe and the icy wind, eddying in behind the rock, threatened to overturn the frail structure every now and then. He tried to smoke, but found no comfort in it after he had with difficulty lighted his pipe; he did not feel inclined to talk, and it was a relief to him when Lisle sank into slumber.

Crestwick long remembered that night. His feet and hands tingled painfully with the cold, the branches he lay upon found out the sorest parts of his aching body, and he would have risen and walked up and down in the lee of the rock had he felt capable of the exertion, but he was doubtful whether he could even get upon his feet. At times thick smoke crept into the tent, and though it set him to coughing it was really a welcome change in his distressing sensations. He was utterly exhausted, but he shivered too much to sleep.

At last, a little while before daybreak, Lisle got up

and strode away to the river after stirring the fire, and then, most cruel thing of all, the lad became sensible of a soothing drowsiness when it was too late for him to indulge in it. For a few moments he struggled hard, and then blissfully yielded. He was awakened by his companion, who was shaking him as he laid a plate and pannikin at his feet.

"We must be off in a few minutes," he announced.

Crestwick raised himself with one hand and blinked.

"I don't know whether I can manage it."

"Then," responded Lisle, hiding his compassion, "you'll have to decide which of two things you'll do — you can stay here until I come back, or you can take the trail with me. I must go on."

Crestwick shrank from the painful choice. He did not think that he could walk; but to prolong the experience of the previous night for another twenty-four hours or more seemed even worse. He ate his breakfast; and then with a tense effort he got upon his feet and slipped the straps of the pack over his shoulders. Moving unevenly, he set off, lest he should yield to his weariness and sink down again.

"Come on!" he called back to Lisle.

He sometimes wondered afterward how he endured throughout the day. He was half dazed; he blundered forward, numbed in body, with his mind too dulled to be conscious of more than a despairing dejection. As he scarcely expected to reach the post, it did not matter how soon he fell. Yet, by instinctive effort stronger than conscious volition, the struggle for life continued; and Lisle's keen anxiety concerning him diminished as the hours went by. Every step brought them nearer warmth and shelter, and made it more possible that help

could be obtained if the lad collapsed. That was the only course that would be available because they were now crossing a lofty wind-swept elevation bare of timber.

It was afternoon when they entered a long valley, and Lisle, grasping Crestwick's arm, partly supported him as they stumbled down the steep descent. Stunted trees straggled up toward them as they pushed on down the hollow, and Lisle surmised that the journey was almost over. That was fortunate, for he had some trouble in keeping his companion upon his feet. At length a faint howl rose from ahead and Lisle stopped and listened intently. The sound was repeated more plainly, and was followed by a confused snarling, the clamor of quarreling dogs.

"Malamutes; the freighters can't have started yet with their sledges," he said to Crestwick, who was holding on to him. "I don't think they can be more than half a mile off."

"I'll manage that somehow," replied the lad.

They went on through thickening timber, until at last a log house came into sight. In front of it stood two sledges, and a pack of snapping, snarling dogs were scuffling in the snow. Lisle was devoutly thankful when he opened the door and helped the lad into a log-walled room where four men, two of whom wore furs, were talking. The air was dry and strongly heated, besides being heavy with tobacco smoke and Crestwick sank limply into a chair. Gasping hard, he leaned forward, as if unable to hold himself upright; but Lisle was not alarmed: he had suffered at times, when exhausted, from the reaction that follows the

change from the bitter cold outside to the stuffiness of a stove-heated room.

"Played out; I'd some trouble to get him along," he explained to the men. "We're going on to the claims at the gulch to-morrow." Then he addressed the two in furs: "I guess you'll take me out a letter?"

"Why, of course; but you'll have to hustle," said one of them, and Lisle turned to a man in a deerskin jacket whom he took for the agent.

"Can you give me some paper?"

"Sure! Sit down right here."

It was not easy to write with stiffened fingers or to collect his thoughts with his head swimming from the change of temperature, but he informed Nasmyth briefly of what he had heard and asked how much truth there was in it. He added that he would have started for England forthwith, only that he could not be sure that this was necessary, and to leave his work unfinished might jeopardize the interests of people who had staked a good deal of money on the success of his schemes. Nevertheless he would come at once, if Nasmyth considered the match likely to be brought about and would cable him at Victoria, from whence a message would reach him. In the meanwhile, Nasmyth could make such use of their knowledge of Gladwyne's treachery as he thought judicious.

Shortly after he had written the letter the two men in furs set out, and when the sound of their departure had died away the agent addressed his guests.

"I'll fix you some supper; you look as if you needed it. Rustle round, Larry, and get the frying-pan on."

They ate an excellent meal and shortly afterward

Crestwick crawled into a wooden bunk, where he reveled in the unusual warmth and the softness of a mattress filled with swamp-hay. He had never lain down to rest in England with the delicious sense of physical comfort that now crept over his worn-out body.

CHAPTER XXIV

MILLICENT SUMMONS HER GUIDE.

LISLE was living luxuriously in Victoria when Nasmyth's answer reached him by mail. Though it was still winter among the ranges of the North, the seaboard city had been bathed in clear sunshine and swept by mild west winds during the past few days, and after the bitter frost and driving snow Lisle rejoiced in the genial warmth and brightness. There are few more finely situated cities than Victoria, with its views across the strait of the white heights of Mount Baker and the Olympians on the American shore, even in the Pacific Province where the environment of all is beautiful.

Lisle was sitting in the hotel lounge after dinner when three English letters were handed to him. The sight of them affected him curiously, and leaning back in his chair he glanced round the room. Like the rest of the great building in which he had his quarters, it was sumptuously furnished, but everything was aggressively new. There was, he felt, little that suggested fixity of tenure and continuity in the West; the times changed too rapidly, people came and went, alert, feverishly bustling, optimistic. In the old land, his friends among the favored few dwelt with marked English calm in homes that had apparently been built to stand forever. Yet he was Western, by deliberate

choice as well as by birth; while there was much to be said for the other life which had its seductive charm, the strenuous, eager one that he led was better.

He opened the letters — one from Bella, announcing her engagement and inquiring about her brother; a second from Millicent, stating that it was decided that she would visit British Columbia in the early summer; and a third from Nasmyth, which, dreading its contents, he kept to the last.

He was, however, slightly reassured when he opened it. Nasmyth's remarks were brief but clear enough. There was no actual engagement between Millicent and Clarence, though Mrs. Gladwyne was doing her utmost to bring one about and Millicent saw the man frequently. In the meanwhile, he did not think there was anything to be done; Lisle could not conclusively prove his story, though he could make a disastrous sensation, which was to be avoided, and it would be wiser to defer the disclosure until the engagement should actually be announced. Millicent's attachment to Clarence was not likely to grow very much stronger in a month or two. In conclusion, he urged Lisle to wait.

On the whole, Lisle agreed with him. Somehow he felt that Millicent would never marry Gladwyne. Apart from his interference, he thought that her instincts would, even at the last moment, cause her to recoil from the match. Furthermore, turning to another aspect of the matter, he could not clear his dead comrade's memory by telling a tale that was founded merely on probabilities. There was nothing for it but to await events, though he was still determined to start for England the moment Nasmyth's letter made this seem advisable.

Shortly afterward, one of his business associates came in: a young man with a breezy, restless manner who would not have been trusted in England with the responsibilities he most efficiently discharged. In the West, a staid and imposing air carries no great weight with it and eagerness and even rather unguided activity are seldom accounted drawbacks. There dulness is dreaded more than rashness.

"I've seen Walthew and Slyde," he announced. "It will be all right about the money; we'll put the hydraulic plant proposition through at the next Board meeting. You'll have to go back right away."

"I've only just come down; the frost's not out of me yet," Lisle grumbled. "Besides, you seem to be going ahead rather fast here in the city. Walthew's a little too much of a hustler; I'd rather he'd stop to think. You're almost as bad, Garnet."

The young man laughed.

"I guess you can't help it, it's the English streak in you; but in a way you're right. Fact is Walthew and I have hustled the rest of the crowd most off their feet, and we mean to keep them on the jump. Last meeting old Macalan's eyes were bulging with horror, he could hardly stammer out his indignation — said our extravagance was sinful. Anyway, you've got to go."

Lisle made an acquiescent grimace. His face was strongly darkened by exposure to the frost and the glare of the snow; his hands were scarred, with several ugly recently-healed wounds on them.

"Well," he complied with some reluctance, "if it's necessary."

"It is," Garnet explained. "Think we're going to

have washing plant worth a good many thousand dollars left lying in the bush or dropped into rivers? You'll have to arrange for transport and break new trails. You can do it best when the snow's still on the ground, and that plant must start working soon after the thaw comes. We've got to justify our expenditure while the season's open."

"You haven't got your authority to buy the plant yet."

Garnet chuckled.

"It was ordered, provisionally, the day you came down; the makers are only waiting for a wire from the Board meeting. In fact, I shouldn't be astonished if some of the work isn't in progress now."

Lisle was quick of thought and prompt in action, but he sometimes felt as if Garnet took his breath away.

"If you have it all arranged, I may as well agree," he laughed. "I'll take Crestwick back."

"That reminds me; he said something about taking an interest — asked if I could get him shares at a moderate premium, though he owned that his trustees might make trouble about letting him have the money."

"He's not to have them!" Lisle replied emphatically. "What's more, the trustees won't part with a dollar unless I guarantee the project — I've been in communication with them. Rest assured that the idea won't get my endorsement."

"I could never get at the workings of the English mind," Garnet declared. "Now if my relatives had any money, I'd rush them all in. This is the safest and best-managed mining proposition on the Pacific

Slope. What kind of morality is it that gathers in the general investor and keeps your friends out?"

"I don't know; it doesn't concern the point. I'm actuated by what you may call a prejudice. You can't remove it."

"Well," Garnet responded good-humoredly, "it's a pretty tough country up yonder and I suppose the lad's of some service. You're saving us a pile of money in experts' fees and I don't see why you shouldn't put him on the company's payroll. I mentioned the thing to Walthew; he was agreeable."

They talked about other matters and presently Crestwick came in, smartly dressed and looking remarkably vigorous and clear-skinned. There were many points of difference between his appearance now and when Lisle had first met him.

"Mr. Garnet has a proposition to make," Lisle informed him; and the Canadian briefly stated it.

Crestwick did not seem surprised, nor did he display much appreciation.

"To tell the truth, I thought you might have mentioned the matter before," he remarked. "Still, if you want my services, you'll have to go up twenty dollars."

"A week?" Garnet asked ironically. "You promise well; if you stay here a year or two you'll make a useful and enterprising citizen. We could get an experienced boss packer for what I offered you."

"Down here, yes. When he got to where the claims are, he'd almost certainly drop you and turn miner, and you couldn't blame him. A man deserves a hundred dollars a day merely for living up yonder. But

it's a month I was speaking of. If you want me, you'll have to come up."

Garnet laughed.

"I guess I can fix it; but we'll get our value out of you."

"That's a compliment, if you look at it in one way," Crestwick grinned in reply.

When Garnet had left them, he turned to Lisle.

"Thanks awfully. Of course, it was your idea."

"Garnet suggested the thing; that's more flattering, isn't it?"

Crestwick looked at him, smiling.

"I'm not to be played so easily as I was when I first met you," he said. "Of course, in a sense, the pay's no great inducement to me; it's the idea of being offered it. I'm going to advise old Barnes, my trustee; he was fond of saying that I was fortunate in being left well off because I'd never earn sixpence as long as I lived, until I stopped the thing by offering him ten to one I'd go out and make it in a couple of hours by carrying somebody's bag from the station. Anyhow, this is the first move."

"Then you're going farther?"

"Quite so," was the cheerful answer. "I'll be a director of this company before I've finished. You can't stop my buying shares when I come into my property."

Lisle was conscious of some relief. It was a laudable ambition and Crestwick promised to be much less of a responsibility than he had once anticipated.

"I've a letter from Bella," Lisle told him. "She still desires to be informed if you're getting along

satisfactorily. I think I can tell her there's no cause for uneasiness."

"Bella's a good sort," returned Crestwick. "She'll stop asking such questions by and by. At least, I think she'll have some grounds for doing so."

They went out into the city and a week afterward they sailed together for the North. It was still winter in the wilds, and though that made Lisle's work a little easier, because rivers and lakes and muskegs were frozen, he found it sufficiently arduous. He had to survey and break new trails suitable for the conveyance of heavy machinery, up rugged valleys and over high divides, and to arrange for transport — canoes here, a log-bridge there, relays of packers farther on. No man's efforts could be wasted, for time was precious and wages are high in the wilderness. Then, when at last the frost relaxed its grip and rock and snow and loosened soil came thundering down the gullies in huge masses, the work grew more difficult as he began to build a dam.

Some of the men sent up to him, artizans from the cities, sailor deserters, dismayed by the toils of the journey and the nature of their tasks, promptly mutinied on arrival. Others dispatched after them failed to turn up, and Lisle never discovered what became of them. The camp-site was a sea of puddled mire with big stones in it; tents and shacks were almost continuously dripping; and every hollow was filled with a raging torrent. Nobody had dry clothes, even to sleep in; the work was mostly carried on knee-deep in water, and at first things got little better as the days grew warmer. The hill-benches steamed and

clammy mists wrapped the camp at night; the downward rush of melting snow increased, and several times wild floods swept away portions of the dam and half-built flume.

In spite of it all, the work went on: foot by foot the wall of pile-bound rock rose and the long wooden conduit curved away down the valley; and when at length the hydraulic plant began to arrive, piecemeal, Lisle found Crestwick eminently useful. He superintended the transport, patrolling the trails and keeping them repaired. His skill with shovel and ax was negligible, but he could send a man or two to mend the gap where the path had slipped away down some gully or to fling a couple of logs across a swollen creek that could not be forded. He got thinner and harder from constant toil and from sleeping, often scantily fed, unsheltered in the rain.

After a while, however, there was a pleasant change: the days grew hot, the nights were clear and cold, and the short, vivid summer broke suddenly upon the mountain land. Then it seldom rained, as the high seaward barrier condensed most of the Pacific moisture, but at times the clouds which crossed the summits unbroken descended in a copious deluge, and it was in the midst of such a downpour that Crestwick returned to camp one evening after a week's absence on the trail. His dripping garments were ragged, his boots gaped open, and his soft felt hat had fallen shapeless about his head. He found Lisle in a similar guise sitting at his evening meal.

"Have they got the pipes and those large castings across the big ravine?" Lisle asked.

"Yes, that has been done," Crestwick answered.

"By the way, one of the packers told me that the man who's coming up to run the plant — Carsley, isn't it? — has arrived. There were some fittings or something wrong and he stopped behind to investigate, but the packer seemed to think he'd get through soon after I did. That turns us loose, doesn't it?"

"I dare say I could hand things over to him in about a week," replied Lisle. "Then we'll clear out. I suppose you won't be sorry?"

Crestwick stretched out his feet to display his broken boots and rent trousers.

"Well," he said, "since I left here, I've spent a good deal of my time in an icy creek, and it's nearly a week since I had any sleep worth speaking of. We had to make a bridge for the freighters to bring those castings over and we'd no end of trouble to get the stringers fixed — the stream was strong and we had to build a pier in it. Not long ago, I'd have considered anybody who did this kind of thing without compulsion mad, but in some mysterious way it grows on you. I don't pretend to explain it, but it won't be with unmixed delight that I'll go back to the city."

He paused and fumbled in his pocket.

"I was forgetting your mail. I'm afraid it's rather pulpy, but I couldn't help that. By the way, I'd a letter from Bella, written at the Frontenac, Quebec. She's brought Carew out; they're going to Glacier very soon, and she still intends to look me up."

Lisle opened the letters handed him and managed to read them, though their condition fully bore out Crestwick's description. Two or three were on business matters, but there was one from Millicent, and he started at the first few lines.

"Miss Gladwyne and Miss Hume have sailed — they must have landed a week ago," he announced. "She wants to go over the ground her brother traversed — you have heard of that project. Nasmyth sailed a week earlier to arrange matters at this end; but I don't know how Miss Hume will get along."

"It's merely a question of transport," asserted Crestwick with the air of an authority on the subject. "So long as you provide sufficient packers, with relays from supply bases, you can travel in comparative comfort, though it's expensive." Then an idea occurred to him. "They're pretty sure to run across Bella; Miss Gladwyne knows Carew."

Lisle sat silent a few minutes, conscious of a strong satisfaction. Millicent was in Canada, and there was no mention of Gladwyne! Then it struck him as curious that Bella should have come over at the same time. As Millicent knew Carew, it was very probable that Bella would insist on joining the expedition, which Millicent might agree to, if, as seemed likely, her rather elderly companion had to be left behind. Nasmyth had, no doubt, already reached British Columbia; and it looked as if those indirectly brought together by George Gladwyne's tragic death would be reunited at the scene of it. This was, Lisle reflected, merely the result of a natural sequence of events, but there was for all that something strangely significant about it.

"Well," he said, "it has been arranged that I'm to act as guide, and Miss Gladwyne says they'll wait for me. As that's the case, I don't see why I shouldn't start as soon as Carsley gets through. I shouldn't wonder if he brings a letter from Nasmyth. It will be

a tough journey, and I'll have to break a new trail. Are you coming, or will you head for Vancouver to join Bella? "

"We'll stick together," replied the lad. "Bella's to stay over here some months, and if she decides to join Miss Gladwyne she'll leave Glacier long before I could reach the place."

Lisle rose and shook out his pipe.

"Then," he responded, "I'll take a look around, and you had better start off the first thing to-morrow and hurry those castings on. There's a good deal to be done if we're to get away when Carsley turns up."

CHAPTER XXV

A RELIABLE MAN

THE sun had just dipped behind a black ridge of hills, and the lake lay still, mirroring the tall cedars on its farther shore. A faint chill was creeping into the mountain air, which was scented with resinous smoke, and somewhere across the water a loon was calling. A cluster of tents stood upon the shingle, and in front of the largest Millicent reclined in a camp-chair. Near her Miss Hume sat industriously embroidering; and Nasmyth lay upon the stones. Bella occupied another camp-chair, a young man with a pleasant brown face sitting at her feet; and farther along the beach a group of packers in blue shirts and duck trousers lay smoking about a fire. By and by one rose and when he began to hack at a drift-log the sharp thudding of his ax startled the loon which departed with a peal of shrieking laughter.

The party had reached the fringe of the wilderness after a long stage journey from the railroad through a rugged country. They had met with no mishaps beyond a delay in the transport of some of their baggage, and everything had been made comparatively easy for them; but they knew that henceforward there might be a difference. Man must depend largely upon his own natural resources in the wilds, where, after furnishing the traveler with the best equipment and

packers to carry it, the power of wealth is strictly limited. A recognition of the fact hovered more or less darkly in all their minds, but Millicent was the first to hint at it.

"So far we have had absolutely nothing to complain of except a little jolting in the stage," she said. "I'm beginning to understand why adventurous sight-seers are coming out here — it's a glorious country!"

"It's my duty to point out that it won't be quite the same as we go on," Nasmyth remarked. "What do you say, Carew?"

"It doesn't matter; he's said it all before," Bella broke in. "I've had to listen to appalling accounts of his previous adventures in Canada, which were, no doubt, meant to deter me; but the reality is that the hotels at Banff and Glacier are remarkably comfortable, and I haven't the least fault to find with this camp. We ought to be grateful to Millicent for letting us come, and though Arthur hinted that it would be a rather sociable honeymoon, I said that was a safeguard. One's illusions might get sooner shattered in a more conventional one." She stooped and ruffled her husband's hair. "Still, he hasn't deteriorated very much on closer acquaintance, and perhaps I'm fortunate in this."

Millicent sat silent for a few moments. She knew, to her sorrow, one man who did not improve the more one saw of him, and that was the man she had tacitly agreed to marry. She could not tell why she had done so — she had somehow drifted into it. Interest, family associations, a feeling that could best be described as liking, even pity, had played their part in influencing her, and now she realized that she could

not honorably draw back when he formally claimed her. She laughed as one of the packers who had a good voice broke into a song.

"That's the climax; it needs only the cockney accent to make the thing complete," she said. "When I was last in London, one heard that silly jingle everywhere. I suppose it's a triumph of the music-halls."

"Or of modern civilization — a rendering of distance of no account," suggested Carew. "There's a good deal to be said for the latter achievement, as we are discovering."

"Distance," declared Bella, "still counts for something here. I've been thinking about Jim all day; imagining him dragging his canoe through the timber beyond those hills, and wondering whether he'd find us when he got to the other side."

"She has been doing more," her husband broke in. "Though she hasn't confessed it, she has been looking out for him ever since this morning. In fact, I discovered that our cook is keeping a supper ready that would satisfy four or five men."

Bella turned to Millicent with a smile.

"Do you think the meal will be wasted?" she asked.

"No; I can hardly believe it."

"Mark the assurance of that answer," commented Carew. "A man couldn't feel it; it's irrational. Miss Gladwyne speaks with a certainty that our guide will come, though she has nothing to base her calculations on — she doesn't know the distance or the difficulties of the way."

"What does that matter?" Bella retorted. "She knows the man."

Carew made a grimace.

"A woman's reasoning. As we've nothing better to do, I'll try to show the absurdity of it. A man, so far as he concerns this discussion, consists of a certain quantity of bones, with muscles and tendons capable of setting them in motion —"

"Be careful," Bella warned him. "It's safer to avoid these details. Besides, you're leaving something out; I don't mean the nerve-cells, but the inner personality, whatever it is, that commands them."

"I'm trying to show that, as a mechanical structure, he is capable of moving his own weight and so much extra a limited distance in a given time, so long as he can secure the necessary food and sleep. Neither the weight nor the distance can be increased except by an effort which, if continued, will soon reduce them below their former level."

Bella laughed.

"Yes," she said, "that's how you reason — mechanically. We're different."

"I'll take quite another line," Nasmyth interposed. "Lisle's traversing a country new to him; he can't tell what rapids, ranges, or thick timber may cause delay. No amount of determination will enable one, for instance, to knock more than a few minutes off the time needed to carry a canoe round a portage, nor by any effort can one cross a range as quickly as one can walk up a valley. Isn't that clear, Millicent?"

There was a smile in the girl's eyes.

"Yes," she replied, "but, all the same, Lisle's supper's waiting."

"Such confidence makes one jealous," grumbled

Carew. "Lisle, whom I haven't met, is evidently a man who keeps his promise. That means a good deal."

"A very great deal," Bella assured him. "Since one's bound to meet with difficulties one can't foresee, it proves that one man has resource, resolution, and many other eminently useful qualities; but all this is getting too serious. I'd better point out that Lisle hasn't even promised to meet us here at any particular time." She paused and laughed mischievously. "Millicent merely sent for him, mentioning to-morrow as the day she would like to start."

A little color crept into Millicent's face, but Bella went on:

"She called and I haven't the least doubt that our guide set out, over ranges, up rapids, across wide lakes. One can't imagine that man taking it easily, and there's the obvious fact that Jim will have to keep up with him. He will find it hard, but I dare say it will do him good."

Nasmyth laughed and strolled away with Carew. The sunset green grew dimmer behind the hills and a pale half-moon appeared above the shadowy woods. It was very still, except for the lapping of the water upon the stones.

Bella leaned back lazily in her chair.

"This is delightful," she exclaimed. "Didn't Clarence want to come?"

The unexpectedness of the question startled Millicent into answering:

"He didn't know."

"Ah! Then you didn't tell him? Why didn't you?"

It was difficult to reply, but there was something in Bella's voice that disarmed Millicent's resentment. Bella had grown gentler since her marriage and less often indulged in bitterness.

"I think," said Millicent, "I didn't want any one to distract me; I'm going to make photographs and sketches for the book, you know."

"But you let us come!"

"Yes," assented Millicent; "you're different."

"That's true. We won't disturb you; and Nasmyth wouldn't count. He's an unobtrusive person, only to the front when he is wanted, which is a good deal to say for him; he doesn't expect anything. No doubt, the same applies to Lisle."

Millicent made no answer and Bella wondered whether she had gone too far.

"But didn't Clarence hear that you were going?" she asked.

"He was in Switzerland with his mother. She had been recommended to try a change."

Bella asked no more questions and Millicent sat wondering how far she had been influenced by the reason she had given for leaving Clarence behind. She had undoubtedly desired to be free to devote herself to the gathering of material for her book, but that was not quite all. She had also half-consciously shrunk from the close contact with Clarence which would have been one result of their life in camp, but this she refused to admit. It was clearer that she desired an extension of the liberty which she must sometime relinquish. Taking it all round, she was rather troubled in mind.

"There's one thing," remarked Bella. "He can't

write you any reproachful letters for stealing away. At least, if he does so, you won't get them."

This, as Millicent recognized, was a relief, but Miss Hume broke in upon her reflections with some trifling request and soon afterward the men strolled back toward the fire. The packers had already gone to sleep; the dew was heavy, but Nasmyth lay down on the shingle and Carew took a place beside his wife's chair. Suddenly Millicent leaned forward with her face turned toward the lake.

"Listen!" she cried sharply. "Can't you hear something?"

No sound reached the others for a moment; and then Nasmyth jumped up.

"Yes," he exclaimed; "canoe paddles."

A measured beat stole out of the silence, increasing until it broke sharply through the tranquil lapping of the water. Then, far up the glittering lake, a dim black bar crept out into the moonlight and by degrees grew plainer.

"Of course, they may be Indians," Bella suggested mischievously.

Carew included Millicent in his answering bow.

"No; I believe I'm beaten. You and Miss Gladwyne were right."

The moonlight was on Millicent's face, and Bella, watching her, read something that roused her interest in its expression — it was stronger than satisfaction, a deeper feeling not unmixed with pride. She had called and the man she had summoned from the depths of the wilderness had responded.

A few minutes later the canoe grounded noisily on the shingle and Crestwick leaped out; Bella, regardless

of the others, flung her arms about his neck and kissed him; and then she held him off so that she might see him. His garments were rent and tattered, his face was very lean, and one of his hands was bleeding from continuous labor with the paddle.

"Oh!" she cried; "you disreputable scarecrow! You're not fit for select society. And how long is it since you had anything to eat?"

"We had a rather rough time getting through; there was thick scrub timber in some of the valleys," Crestwick explained. "We might have made things easier by spending another few days on the trail, but Lisle wouldn't listen when I suggested it."

"Then you did suggest it," said Bella reproachfully. "Of course, I'm merely your sister."

"I don't want a better one," Crestwick rejoined, grinning. "It strikes me you're looking prettier than you did; but that's perhaps because you have taken to wearing more ladylike clothes. As regards my appearance, I'll venture to say that yours will be very much the same before you've finished this journey."

Lisle had walked toward Miss Hume and had shaken hands with her before he turned to Millicent. That pleased the girl.

"We ran it rather close, but the day isn't quite finished yet," he laughed. "We had some little trouble once or twice which prevented our turning up earlier."

Millicent smiled in a manner that sent a thrill through him.

"I can only say that we kept your supper; but that's significant, isn't it?" Then she called to Nasmyth.

"Will you see if the cook's awake?"

She had no opportunity for saying anything further, for Carew came up with Bella, who was voluble, and some time later Lisle and Crestwick sat down to a bountiful meal, while Millicent and Bella waited on them. Lisle was slightly embarrassed by their ministrations, but Crestwick openly enjoyed them.

"Put the plate where I can reach it easily," he bade his sister. "Look how you have placed that cup; if I move, it will spill!"

"You have more courage than I have, Jim," Carew remarked with a smile.

"I've needed it," the lad declared. "I've borne enough from Bella in my time. She'll no doubt say that I deserved it, and there may be some ground for the notion."

When the meal was finished they all gathered round the replenished fire, Lisle lying back in the shadow because of the state of his clothes. With the exception of Jim, the others were dressed much as they had been at home; their conversation was light and easy, and their manner tranquil. If he could have blotted out the background of tall straight trunks and shadowy rocks, he could have imagined that they were lounging on a sheltered English lawn. Double-skinned tents, camp-chairs, and other signs of a regard for physical comfort bore out the idea in his mind. These English people with their quiet confidence that what they needed — and that was a good deal — would, as had always happened, somehow be supplied, were at once exasperating and admirable. They were the same everywhere, unmoved by change, claiming all that was choicest as by right, and very much at ease on

the fringe of the wilderness. They did not belong to it; one could have imagined that it belonged to them. Their journey, however, had only begun, and there were alterations that must obviously be made on the morrow.

Then Lisle yielded to a strong sense of satisfaction. For the next month or two he would be almost constantly in Millicent's company; her companions were his friends, and he thought that he would not be troubled by Gladwyne's presence. Desiring to assure himself on the latter point, he turned to Bella.

"Nobody has mentioned Clarence. I was wondering if he would join us?"

"No," she answered, smiling at him meaningly; "he wasn't invited." Then she moved away, leaving Lisle more deeply content.

Presently the party broke up, and when they reached the tent they jointly occupied, Miss Hume remarked to Millicent:

"You look unusually pleased, my dear."

"I dare say I do," Millicent smiled. "It's something to feel that one's confidence has been justified, and perhaps rather more to rest assured that everything will now go as smoothly as possible."

"I suppose you mean since Mr. Lisle has come? Apart from his practical abilities, I'm fond of that man. No doubt you noticed that he came first to me, as the eldest, though he is aware that I'm only a dependent. In a way, of course, he wasn't altogether right, Bella Carew being married and you the actual hostess."

"I wonder if such points are of any importance in the bush," Millicent answered, laughing. "But I'm

glad Mr. Lisle's action won your good opinion. I like my friends to be graceful."

Miss Hume, faded, gray-haired and formal, looked reflective.

"The word you used is not quite the one I should have chosen. Clarence Gladwyne is graceful; I think this Canadian is something better. To-night he was actuated by genuine chivalry. My esteem may not be worth much, but it is his."

Moved by some impulse, Millicent kissed her.

"I've no doubt he'd value it. But I can't have Clarence depreciated; and it's getting very late."

Miss Hume noticed a slight change in the girl's voice as she mentioned Gladwyne. She put out the lamp but it was some time before she went to sleep. She loved Millicent, and she believed there was trouble awaiting her.

CHAPTER XXVI

LISLE TURNS AUTOCRAT

ON the morning after his arrival, Lisle called the company together and first of all addressed Millicent.

"It's your wish that I should act as guide to this expedition?"

Millicent answered in the affirmative and he went on:

"The guide must be commander-in-chief, with undisputed authority. Before we start, I must ask if any one objects to that?"

They gave him full power, with acclamation, and he nodded.

"Well," he continued, "I'd better explain that the main difficulty attending any expedition into an almost uninhabited region is to keep it supplied with food and means of shelter; it's a question of transport. There are two ways of getting over the difficulty — by reducing the weight, or by increasing the number of packers; and the latter are useful only when each man can transport more than will satisfy his personal requirements. I think that's clear?"

They assented with some curiosity mixed with a slight uneasiness.

"Then," he proceeded, "I'll exercise my authority by asking you to lay out in front of each tent everything you have brought with you."

"Including our clothes?" Bella asked.

"Assuredly," said Crestwick. "You can put them in a heap; it's the quantity and not the cut that counts."

It was evident that the leader's first instructions were received with little favor. Millicent looked dubious and Miss Hume alarmed; but the orders were carried out, and Lisle accompanied by Crestwick made a tour of inspection. Stopping in front of Bella's and Carew's tent, he pointed to their rather imposing pile of baggage.

"Two-thirds of this will have to be left behind, though we'll try to pick it up again. You can make your selection." He went on to Millicent's and Miss Hume's collection. "We can't take more than half of this," he informed them. Then he addressed the company in general. "The three ladies must occupy Miss Gladwyne's tent, and the men Carew's; Nasmyth's must be abandoned. Each man's outfit must be cut down to one change of clothes and his blanket."

The announcement was received with open murmurs. They had all been accustomed to every comfort with which a high civilization could provide them; they had already cut down their belongings to the lowest limit at which, in their estimation, life could be made endurable; and many of the articles they were told must be left behind were costly and artistic. It was a severe test of obedience and even Nasmyth, who knew the wilderness, desiring to safeguard the women, was not inclined to yield. Lisle had only Crestwick to support him until Bella touched his arm.

"Stand fast," she urged, somewhat to his surprise. "If you give way an inch now, you'll be sorry."

Lisle smiled and then raised his voice.

"I'm afraid I must insist. Since you object, Carew, are you willing to carry forty pounds upon your back while you break a trail through thick timber, where we find it needful to leave the water?"

"Certainly not," said Carew decidedly.

"Then," Lisle advised dryly, "you had better leave as much as possible of the weight behind; there's no likelihood of our getting more packers. You have to choose between a camp-chair or a suitcase, for example, and your daily dinner."

For a moment or two they hesitated. Lisle had, straining his new authority to the utmost, asked them a very hard thing, for in their regard some degree of luxury was less an accidental favor than a prescriptive right. Then Bella took up a long garment and with a little resolute gesture flung it from her.

"That," she laughed, "is the first sacrifice to the stern guardians of the wilds. It ought to satisfy them, considering who made it and what it cost." She seized a small valise and hurled it after the dress. "There's the next; I'm thankful my complexion will stand the weather."

Millicent looked up at Lisle, indicating a small easel, a bulky sketch-book, and a box of water-colors.

"Are these to go?" she asked with indignant eyes.

"No," he answered gravely; "they're the reason for the whole expedition, and their transport is provided for. But you'll have to jettison something else."

The selections were made and Lisle summoned one of the packers.

"Roll these things up in Mr. Nasmyth's tent, Pete," he bade him. "You'll have to make a cache of them."

"Like burying money, isn't it?" remarked the man, regarding the pile of sundries with a grin. "Guess they won't be worth much when they're dug up again."

Half an hour later, three deeply-laden canoes left the beach; and all day the party paddled up the gleaming lake and crept with poles going up a slow, green river. Sunset was near when they landed and ate supper among a clump of cedars; and after the meal most of them, cramped with the canoe journey, climbed the steep hill-bench or strolled away along the shingle. Lisle was lying, smoking, beside the fire when Millicent sauntered toward him and sat down upon a neighboring stone.

"You were right, of course," she apologized. "Am I forgiven? It was only a momentary revolt."

He smiled, though his bronzed coloring deepened, for there was an unusual gentleness in her voice.

"It was very natural," he replied. "I had expected more determined opposition; but I didn't go farther than was necessary."

"No; I think the others realize that now."

"They'll be more convinced of it later," he responded with a trace of grimness.

"I don't think they'll give you any trouble; but since you got rid of Nasmyth's tent, where will you and Crestwick sleep?"

"Jim and I can make a shelter of some kind; we're used to the bush."

"What have you done to the lad?" Millicent asked. "I can hardly realize the change in him; he's a different being."

"I've merely given him a chance he would hardly have had in England. The country has done the rest.

You can ask him how much advice or admonishment he got."

"Oh," she explained, "I shouldn't expect you to give him advice; it's cheap!"

He made no reply, and her eyes rested with quiet approval on his rather embarrassed face. She had no doubt that close contact with this man had had more to do with the change in Crestwick than the influence of the country; and then she recollected that the lad's degeneration had been marked and rapid while he had taken Clarence for a model. It was a troublesome thought and she banished it with an effort.

"You didn't get here without difficulty; and our journey will keep you away from your business for some time," she observed.

"As to that, I've earned a little leisure; and I've been looking forward to this trip ever since I left England. Now it's almost like being back there again, only that in some ways it's even better."

So far as their surroundings might explain his satisfaction, Millicent could frankly agree with him. The black spires of the cedars, towering far above them, cut in rigid tracery against the splendors of the sunset sky; one stretch of the river still shone with a saffron light; the rest, which had grown dim, flowed through deepening shadow. Filmy mist trails streaked the rugged hills and the hoarse clamor of a rapid quivered in the cool air. Behind it all, there was something that set the lonely scene apart from any other that the girl had looked upon — one could realize that this was as yet an untamed and unsullied region. But her companion was accustomed to the wilderness, so there must be, she thought, another cause for his content.

"I am glad you do not grudge the time you may have to spend with us," she said.

"Grudge it!" he exclaimed; and then, restraining himself, he broke into a soft laugh. "You may accuse me of that feeling when you hear me grumble."

The ring in his voice had its meaning and it left her thoughtful. The revelation was not altogether new; she had guessed his regard for her, but she imagined that she could hold him at arm's length if it were necessary. It was with him as it was with Nasmyth, and they were alike in their self-restraint. Nasmyth had quietly accepted his dismissal when she had shown him that it was irrevocable; and the Canadian would not trouble her with futile complaints. She wondered if out of three suitors she had not chosen the least desirable in some respects; but this could not be admitted and she resolutely thrust the idea aside.

"There's a point I'd better mention," Lisle resumed in a matter-of-fact tone. "I'm not going to follow the route of the first expedition from the beginning. I've thought of a shorter and easier one; we'll strike the other by the big portage and then follow it down."

"Are you afraid of wearing out your untried followers?"

"Well," he admitted, "I'm taking no risks that can be avoided this journey."

She smilingly commended his caution, though she was conscious of a desire, which must be held in check, to see what he would do if he could be shaken out of his self-control. She approved of his restraint, because only while it was exerted could she meet him on friendly terms; but, as had happened on his last

afternoon in England, it piqued her. She wondered how much it cost him.

"After all," she said with a forced laugh, "it's better to keep carefully clear of danger."

"Yes," he agreed; "but there's now and then a temptation to face the hazard. One feels that it's worth while."

"Never mind that. I think I'd rather enjoy the wildness of this scene than to philosophize. Tell me about the bear and deer we are likely to come across."

He discoursed at length, and she sat listening while the light faded and the cedars grew blacker. Then the others approached and they went back to camp.

"Breakfast will be at seven prompt," he informed them. "The packers will strike tents while you eat, so have everything ready. There are two awkward portages to be tackled to-morrow."

They started in a clammy mist which clung about them until they reached the foot of the first wild rapid, where the green and white flood came roaring over ledges and between huge boulders, with wisps of spray tossing over it. This was Millicent's first sight of the river in anger, and she watched, at first almost appalled and then thrilled with strong excitement, when Lisle and one packer took the leading canoe up the lowest rush. They stood upright in the unloaded, unstable craft, long pole in hand, guiding her with what seemed wonderful skill across madly-whirling eddies and through tumbling foam, while Nasmyth and another man, floundering deep in water, assisted them at intervals with the tracking-line. Once Nasmyth's companion lost his footing and disappeared, but he rose and Millicent saw that instead of clinging to the

line for safety he loosed it, and swimming down a wild white tumult, came dripping ashore. This, she thought, was bracing work that made for more than physical vigor; but she could not imagine Clarence indulging in it. It was too elemental, too barbarous for him. He was fond of exertion in the form of sport, but he required somebody to saddle and lead out his horse and to load his second gun. There was a difference between him and those who delighted to grapple at first hand with nature.

She was astonished to see Crestwick get a heavy flour bag upon his back and move away with it over very rough stones, and she joined in Bella's laugh when Carew attempted to shoulder another and dropped it.

"It's the first time he's ever tried such a thing in his life," Bella remarked. "There's nothing like personal experience. You don't realize that it isn't easy when you give a porter sixpence to lift your biggest trunk at a station."

"The difference is that the porter's used to it," Carew, who was red-faced and breathless, pointed out.

"It looks as if that would apply to you before we've finished," Bella retorted. "If you can't do anything else, why don't you help those men in the river?"

Carew made a gesture of resignation and resolutely plunged in.

"That," laughed Bella, to Millicent and Miss Hume, "is excellent discipline; after a little of it, I believe he'll do me credit. I can think of a few overfed men that I'd like to put through a drastic course of it, only in their case I'd go in the canoe and take my heaviest luggage with me."

"It wouldn't be wise," asserted Millicent. "When they reached broken water they'd probably let you go."

She collected an armful of odds and ends and set off up-stream over the portage. The men spent several hours bringing the canoes and stores across, and there followed some laborious poling before they reached the second rapid, which was safely passed. The party was quieter than usual after supper that night. They had had their first glimpse of the strenuous life of the wilderness and it had impressed them. The effect passed off, however, as they pushed on day after day without mishap. Millicent, in particular, delighted in all she saw — the fresh green of the birches among the somber cedars, the lonely heights that ever surrounded them, the gleaming lakes, the broad green flood that here and there filled the gorges with its thunder.

She suffered no discomfort she could not laugh at; there was something that braced her in mind and body in the mountain air; and Clarence no longer held a leading place in her memory. She realized now that the thought of him had hitherto occasioned her a vague uneasiness. Indeed, she was almost glad that he was far away; liberty was unexpectedly sweet, and though she had a few misgivings, she meant to enjoy it while it lasted.

Then one afternoon when they were stopped by a fall, she slipped away from the others with her sketch-book, and wandering back through straggling bush, climbed a rocky ridge. The ascent was steep, but by clambering up a gully she reached the summit, and after strolling along it she sat down to sketch the

gorge below. The work absorbed her attention and some time had passed when the lengthening shadows warned her that she would better retrace her steps to camp.

It proved difficult. She could not find the gully she had climbed up and the side of the ridge was almost precipitous and was clothed with brushwood. At last, however, she reached a spot from which it seemed possible to make the descent; but after scrambling and sliding for some distance she was suddenly stopped by a sheer drop of several yards to a ledge. Being agile, she might have reached the ledge by lowering herself by her hands, but it was narrow and slanted outwards, so that she feared to slip off in alighting and fall over the crag below. She attempted to climb back to the summit and found it impossible, for the stones she seized were loose and came away when she disturbed them. She could only stay where she was and call for assistance, though the clamor of the fall, ringing up the valley, almost drowned her voice.

By and by the sunlight faded off the rocks above, the trees below grew shadowy, and Millicent began to feel anxious and to envy the others who would, no doubt, be sitting down to their evening meal. They would miss her and set out in search; but they might not reach her until it was dark, when it would be difficult to extricate her, and she had no desire to spend the night among the rocks. She made another determined attempt to get up, but slid back, nearly slipping over the edge, while her sketch-book went clattering far below. Then she sat still, calling out at intervals.

The light grew dimmer, white mists began to trail about the heights above, and Millicent was getting cold. She was also getting angry — it looked as if the others were too busy eating or talking to care what had become of her; some of them ought to have come in search. She felt a grievance against Lisle in particular. Why she should blame him more than Nasmyth or Carew was not very clear, except that he was more used to the country; but she felt that he ought to have come to her rescue. Then, fearing that she would have to spend the night on the hillside, she carefully crept toward a small level space near a jutting rock and sat down, shivering, while dusk slowly crept across the bush.

CHAPTER XXVII

AN UNPLEASANT SURPRISE

MILLICENT had no intention of going to sleep among the rocks, but after a while she grew drowsy, and when at length she raised her head with a start the moon hung over the hills across the river, flooding the heights above her with a silvery light. The trees below were sharper in form, but everything was very still; only the thunder of the fall seemed to have increased in depth of tone. Millicent shivered from the cold as she sent a sharp cry ringing across the woods.

This time it was answered, and she recognized the voice. Looking down, she could see Lisle's black figure moving cautiously along the ledge, for although the lower rocks were wrapped in shadow it is never altogether dark in the northern summer. Coming out into the moonlight, he examined the slab of rock which had arrested her descent, but when he spoke she was not quite pleased with his very matter-of-fact tone. It left something to be desired — she thought he might have displayed more satisfaction at finding her safe.

"Is there anything you could catch hold of at the top?" he asked. "If so, you'd better lower yourself until I can reach you."

Anxious as she was to get down, Millicent hesitated;

if she did as he suggested she would descend into his arms. She was not unduly prudish, and indeed, after being left alone in the impressive solitude of the wilds, she would have been glad of the reassuring grasp of a human being. But an obscure feeling, springing, perhaps, from primitive instincts, made her shrink from close contact with this particular man.

"No," she answered coldly; "the rock is loose. Besides, the ledge is narrow, and if I came down heavily, we might both fall over."

He again examined the slab, and then stood still, considering.

"Well," he decided, "there's a crack some way up that should give me a hold, and a bit of a projection you could rest a foot on yonder. Then if you gave me one hand, I could lower you down."

He came up, thrusting his fingers into a fissure near the summit and finding a tiny support for his toes. Lowering herself cautiously, she clutched the hand he extended.

"Now," he cautioned, "as gently as possible!"

Loosing her hold above, she hung for a moment or two, half afraid to let go his hand, while his arm and body grew tense with the strain and she could hear his labored breath. Summoning her courage she relaxed her grasp. In another second she was safe upon the ledge, and, scrambling down, he stood beside her with a set, flushed face, the veins protruding on his forehead.

"I'm glad that's over; I was badly scared," he acknowledged.

She thrilled at the confession, though she thought there had been no serious risk; his concern for her

safety was strangely pleasant and the strenuous grasp of his fingers had stirred her.

"Oh," she replied, "I believe I was quite safe after you got hold of me."

He glanced at the steep face of broken rock that ran down into the shadow.

"If we'd gone over, we might not have brought up for a while," he said. "But what's that resting on yonder jutting stone?"

"I'm sorry it's my sketch-book," Millicent answered unguardedly. "It's nearly filled."

"Then wait here a little."

"You can't get it!" Millicent cried sharply. "You mustn't try!"

"It's quite easy."

Millicent could not resist the temptation to make a rather dangerous experiment.

"And yet you were afraid a minute or two ago!"

"Yes," he answered, looking at her steadily. "But that was different."

She felt her heart-beats quicken and her face grow hot, but she laid a restraining hand on his arm.

"I won't let you go."

"You must be reasonable," he urged, moving a pace away. "That book stands for a good deal of high-grade work. If you lose it, you will have wasted all the first part of your journey. Besides, I should feel very mean if I left it lying there."

He lowered himself over the edge, and moving from cranny to cranny and stone to stone, went cautiously down, while she watched him with her hands closed tight. What the actual peril was she could not esti-

mate; but it looked appallingly dangerous, particularly when in one place he had to descend from a slightly overhanging stone. He reached the book, however, and came up, and when at length he stood beside her his expression was quite normal and he was only a little breathless. Again she felt a disconcerting thrill which was accompanied by a confused sense of pride. What he had done was in her service, and this time he had shown no sign of fear or strain.

"Thank you," she said. "But I'm a little angry — you shouldn't have gone. I should never have forgiven myself if you had got hurt."

There was light enough to show that the blood crept into his face; but he turned and glanced at the descending ledge.

"You had better put your hand on my shoulder where it's steep," he suggested. "Still, we're not going to have much trouble in getting down."

They had reached level ground before anything more was said, and then she turned to him with a smile.

"Why didn't you come before? You left me an unpleasantly long while among the rocks."

"We didn't miss you until supper," he explained. "Then I set off at once, but I didn't know which way to look and the bush was pretty thick." Stopping in the moonlight, he indicated his rent attire. "I think this speaks for itself," he added humorously. "There's one consolation — the things belong to Carew."

Millicent was glad that he was not going to be serious.

"I remember that you didn't bring much of an out-

fit," she replied. "I suppose you had one. What became of it?"

"I left it behind, in pieces, on the thorns and rocks along a good many leagues of trail; but it wasn't extensive — when you travel in this country you have often to choose between food and clothes. It was obviously impossible to buy any more, but the day before we reached camp I made Crestwick cut my hair. After a look at myself in Nasmyth's pocket-glass, I'm inclined to think he was unwarrantably proud of his success."

After that they chatted lightly, until they walked into the glow of the camp-fire, and while Bella and Miss Hume plied Millicent with questions and congratulations, Lisle took up Nasmyth's repeating rifle and fired it several times.

"That will bring the boys in," he explained. "Now I'll get Miss Gladwyne's supper."

During the meal the others came back and when they had all assembled, looking the worse for their scramble through the bush, Crestwick, who had occasional lapses from good behavior, addressed them collectively.

"Wasn't I right?" he asked. "I offered anybody three to one that Lisle would be the first to find her."

"Then you ought to be ashamed of it, after the expensive way in which your confidence in your opinions has often been shown to be mistaken," declared Bella. "Besides, you promised me you wouldn't waste your money that way again!"

"This time I was backing a moral certainty," Crestwick rejoined. "That isn't gambling; if you're not convinced, you can ask the others on what grounds they were so unwilling to take me."

Receiving no encouragement, he addressed Millicent, who was extremely vexed with him.

"I suppose you know that you have given us all a good deal of anxiety. You ought to feel contrite."

"I'm not sorry if I've given you a good deal of trouble," Millicent retorted. "You were a long time in coming to my rescue."

"That," he exclaimed, "is just the kind of thing Bella used to delight in saying, though I'll own that she's been much more civil lately. It's possible that Carew's patience is not so long as mine."

"Aren't you getting rather personal?" Carew hinted.

Crestwick subsided with an indulgent grimace, but when they retired to their shelter Lisle turned upon him.

"It struck me that those jokes of yours were in what you would call uncommonly bad form," he said. "It would be better if you didn't make any more of them."

"Bella doesn't mind; she's used to me," Crestwick grinned.

"I wasn't referring to Bella — she has somebody to take care of her."

"And Miss Gladwyne hasn't? Still, that's her own fault, isn't it? In my opinion, she has only to say the word." He paused, seeing his companion's face in the moonlight, for its expression was not encouraging. "Oh, well!" he added, "you needn't lose your temper. There are people who can never see when a thing's humorous; I'll wind up."

In the meanwhile Millicent sat in the entrance of her

tent, looking out between the dark trunks of the cedars on the glittering river. It sluiced by, lapping noisily upon the shingle, lined with streaks of froth, and the roar of the neighboring fall filled the lonely gorge. The wildness of her surroundings had its charm; she had been happier among them than she had been at any time during the last twelve months in England, and now she was uneasily conscious of the reason. Lisle's constant watchfulness over her comfort, his cheery conversation, even the sight of him when he was too busy to talk, were strangely pleasant. She realized why she had made him take the harder way in helping her down from the rock and the knowledge was disconcerting. She had been afraid to trust herself to the clasp of his arms, but not because of any want of confidence in him.

Then she saw Carew kiss Bella among the cedars before she left him to walk toward the tent, and the sight stirred her blood. It was clear that she must be on her guard; her guide must be kept firmly at a distance, though this promised to be difficult. She was, to all intents and purposes, pledged to Clarence; and until Bella joined her she tried to fix her thoughts on him, wondering where he was and what he was doing, without being able to find much interest in the question.

As it happened, Clarence was then sitting in a luxurious parlor-car as a big west-bound train sped through the forests of Ontario, but his face was troubled and he felt ill at ease. A little more than a fortnight earlier he had met Marple at a Swiss hotel, and the man had informed him that Miss Gladwyne and Miss Hume had sailed for Canada. Nasmyth, he

added, had gone by a previous steamer, to make arrangements for some journey they wished to undertake. This was the first intimation Clarence had received. Millicent had written to him on the day before she sailed, but the letter, following him to one of the Italian valleys, had not yet reached him, and he was filled with consternation. She had stolen away, as if she did not wish to be burdened with his company; she was going to visit the scene of her brother's death, no doubt under the guidance of Lisle, who had strong suspicions concerning it. He might communicate them to Millicent; perhaps he had done so already, which would account for her silent departure. With an effort Gladwyne roused himself to action. He made up his mind to follow her and, if necessary, attempt some defense. Perhaps, he thought, he could manage to destroy any evidence of his treachery which the Canadian had discovered.

Still, he was tormented by doubts as he lounged in the parlor-car, and, growing restless, he went out on the rear platform and lighted a cigar. There was faint moonlight, and dim trees fled past him; the rattle of wheels and the rush of the cool wind was soothing. He could not think while he stood holding on by the brass rail to protect himself against the lurching, and he found a relief in the roar as the great train swept across a foaming river. They had been detained at a junction during the afternoon, and the engineer was evidently bent on making up the wasted time.

Presently the door of the next car opened, and Gladwyne started violently as a dark figure came out on to the platform.

"Batley!" he cried. "What in the name of wonder has brought you here!"

Batley, moving forward into the moonlight, regarded him with a mocking smile.

"Nothing very remarkable; I'd several motives. For one thing, I felt I'd like the trip — had a stroke of luck not long ago which justified the expense. British Columbia's nowadays almost as accessible as parts of Norway, where I've generally gone to, and I understand it's wilder."

"But how is it I haven't seen you on the train?" Gladwyne asked, in no way reassured by the man's careless explanation.

"I only got on at the last junction." Batley's tone was significant as he proceeded. "I was too late for your Allan boat; when I inquired about you in London I found that you had gone; but I caught the next New York Cunarder and came on by Buffalo. I suppose you stopped a day or two in Montreal, which explains how I've overtaken you."

"We were held up by ice off Newfoundland."

"Well," suggested Batley, "suppose we go into the smoking end of the car. I dare say you'd like a talk and it's rather noisy here. Besides, the cinders are a little too plentiful."

They went in and Batley, lounging in a seat, lighted a cigar and waited with an amused expression for the other to begin. Gladwyne was intensely uneasy. It had been a vast relief to be free from his companion, and the last thing he desired was that Batley, who was a remarkably keen-witted man, should go over the track of George's expedition in company with Lisle.

"Now," he said, "I'd be glad if you would tell me

exactly why you followed me. The reason you gave didn't seem sufficient."

"Then my other object ought to be clear. You're carrying a good deal of my money; I felt it would be wiser to keep an eye on you. As I said, I'd had a stroke of luck that enabled me to get away."

"I suppose that means somebody has suffered!" Gladwyne, in his bitterness, could not help the injudicious sneer.

"Oh, no," returned Batley good-humoredly. "In this case, I'd set a man on his feet — it's now and then as profitable as pulling one down, and my methods aren't always destructive. The fellow was straight and I'm inclined to believe he was grateful. I don't think he could have found anybody else to back him, but I'm not afraid of a risk." He paused and smiled at his companion. "Sometimes I make mistakes; I did so with you."

Gladwyne flushed, but Batley proceeded:

"I may remind you that when I financed you I was led to believe that you would succeed to a handsome property; not one that was stripped of its working capital. I'll give you credit for misleading me rather cleverly. All this is to the point, because it explains my watchful attitude. You're the kind of man I prefer to keep in sight."

Disgust, humiliation and anger possessed Gladwyne, but he knew that he was in his companion's hands, and he did not think that Batley had stated all of his reasons yet. It was possible that he expected to discover something in British Columbia that would strengthen his hold on his victim.

"Well," he replied with an attempt at calmness,

" we needn't quarrel, since it looks as if we'd have to put up with each other for some time. Have you finished what you have to say? "

" Not quite. There's one question yet. When do you expect to marry Miss Gladwyne? "

" What is that to you? " Clarence broke out.

" Just this — I'm anxious to form some idea as to when I'm likely to get my money back. Since Miss Crestwick dropped you, there's only Miss Gladwyne available, so far as I know, and you have got to marry money and do so pretty soon. I'm willing to do anything that may help on the match."

Gladwyne's face burned, he looked savage, but Batley continued to watch him with an ironical smile.

" I don't want to drive you too hard, but I'm only stating an obvious fact," he concluded. " Now I'll leave you to think it over while I interview the porter of the sleeping-car."

CHAPTER XXVIII

CLARENCE REACHES CAMP

THE evening was dull and gloomy, a gray sky hung over the desolate hills, and Millicent, sitting alone on a rocky slope, felt troubled and depressed. Beneath her, the long hollow that crossed the big divide stretched back, colored in cheerless neutral tints, into drifting mist. It was sprinkled with little ponds, and banded here and there with belts of stunted trees, small birches and willows, and ragged cedars that hid the oozy muskegs under them.

The girl was worn with travel, for Lisle had abandoned the canoes some time ago, and the party had followed, by what he called easy stages, the trail he and the packers had broken, though the women had found the way hard enough. This, he had informed them, would shorten the journey a good deal, and he expected to fall in with some Indians, from whom canoes could be obtained, once they had crossed the divide; failing this, they might be compelled to retrace their steps.

It was up the forbidding hollow they had lately reached that George Gladwyne had doggedly plodded, faint with hunger, on his last journey. Millicent had followed his trail for the past two days and she had found them filled with painful memories. All that Lisle had shown her had brought back her brother and

once more she mourned for him. But that was an old wound that had partly healed and she could face the sorrowful story of George's last struggles with a certain pride; he had endured with unwavering courage, and the manner of his death became him. The girl had other troubles which clouded the present and filled her with misgivings for the future.

During her first few weeks in the wilderness, lying all day under clear sunshine and cloudless skies, it had seemed to her an enchanted land. Snow-peaks, and crystal lakes that mirrored ranks of climbing firs, struck her as endowed with an almost unearthly beauty and as wonderful a tranquillity; and when she pushed on through the savage portals of the mountains there was something that stirred her nature in the sight of the foaming rivers and the roar of the spray-veiled falls. Now, however, the glamour had gone, it had been rudely banished on the night when Lisle had helped her down the rocks. She, who had allowed Clarence to believe that she would marry him, had found a strange delight in the company of another man; one whom she might have loved had she been free, she tried to convince herself, in a determined attempt to hide the fact that her heart cried out for him.

Lisle had pushed on with a single companion on the previous night to see if he could obtain canoes; the packers were breaking a trail, and the others were resting in camp. Millicent was glad of this, for she wanted to be alone. Suddenly, as she looked down the hollow, two indistinct figures appeared out of the mist. The packers had gone up the valley, but there was no doubt that it was two men she saw, and they were

apparently making for the camp. As the party had met nobody since entering the wilderness, she felt curious about the strangers. There was something in the carriage of one of them that seemed familiar; and then the uneasiness of which she had already been conscious became intensified as she recognized that he walked like Clarence.

A few minutes later the men were hidden by a growth of willows and she sped back to camp, scrambling among the rocks with a haste that was born of nervous tension. She did not see the men again — it was needful to pick a path down the steep descent very carefully — and when she came, breathless, upon the clump of birches among which the tents were pitched it was evident from the hum of voices that the strangers had already arrived. Pushing in among the trees, she stopped, with her heart beating unpleasantly fast, face to face with Clarence.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, moving forward to meet her; "now I'm rewarded for my journey. How fit and brown you look, Millicent!"

She stood still a moment, with an expressionless face, finding no words to say; then with an effort she roused herself and shook hands with him.

"You must have had a trying march if you followed our trail," she said. "But how did you get here — I mean why did you leave Switzerland?"

Crestwick chuckled.

"That's very much what we all asked him," he broke in. "In one way, it's hardly civil; if we'd known he was coming, we'd have been better prepared to express our delight."

The lad was not, as a rule, considerate and he suf-

fered from want of tact, but there was truth behind what he said. It is given to only a few to be sure of a warm and sincere welcome when they take their friends by surprise. Nasmyth frowned at Crestwick, who had rashly hinted at the feeling of constraint that had seized upon the party. Millicent, however, was looking at Gladwyne and her heart grew softer as she noticed his weariness and his strained expression.

"Well," she said when he had answered her, "you must sit down and rest. Nasmyth and Crestwick will get you something to eat as soon as possible."

It was not what she would have wished to say — it sounded dreadfully commonplace — but Batley came forward with an easy laugh.

"I'm afraid our young friend"— he indicated Crestwick —"is not a diplomatist, but on the whole his fault's a good one; he's more or less honest. You'll forgive us for surprising you; it was quite impossible to send you a warning."

Millicent smiled, the tension suddenly slackened, and as the packer who cooked was away with his comrade, they all set about preparing a meal which, thanks to Batley, was eaten amid a flow of lively conversation. The man was weary, but he could rise to an occasion and summon to his aid a genial wit. Clarence was glad of this; fatigue had reacted on him, increasing his anxiety, and he had been chilled by the coldness of his reception. Even the cordiality his companions now displayed was suspicious, because it suggested that they wished to atone for something that had previously been lacking. He ate, however, and talked when he found an opportunity, and afterward acquiesced when Millicent declined to be drawn away from the others.

When the meal was finished, they sat close together about the fire, for coldness came with the dusk, but by degrees the conversation languished. The increasing chill, the gloom and the desolation of their surroundings affected them all; and nobody had been quite at ease since Gladwyne's arrival. He was too tired to make more than spasmodic attempts to talk, and though Millicent was sorry for him she could not help contrasting him with Lisle. She had seen the latter almost worn out with severe labor, but even then he had been cheerful, ready to encourage his companions with lively badinage. He seemed to take pleasure in forcing his body to the utmost strain it could bear.

The light had died away into the partial obscurity which would last until sunrise when Lisle walked into camp. The fire had burned up, and Millicent saw his start and his face set hard at the sight of Gladwyne.

"This is a surprise," he said. "When did you get here?"

"About two hours ago. We found where you left the water and followed up your trail," Gladwyne answered.

"How many packers and what stores did you bring?"

"Two packers," replied Gladwyne. "There were no more available at the last settlement. Batley has a list of the provisions — we cut them down as much as possible. As we were anxious to overtake you, we traveled light."

Lisle took the list Batley gave him and examined it by the glow of the fire.

"It looks as if you didn't mind endangering the safety of the whole party," he broke out. "This

expedition is already quite large enough, and you add four people to it with less than half the necessary stores, so that you could save yourself a little trouble on the journey! What's more important, we can't make up for the shortage by better speed. Only two of you can pack an average load, though all four must be fed."

Millicent had listened, hot with anger and a little surprised. Lisle had his faults, including a shortness of temper, but he was now showing a strain of what she considered primitive barbarism which he had hitherto concealed. A cultured Englishman would have led Clarence aside or waited for an opportunity before remonstrating with him; and then her face burned as she wondered whether Lisle had been actuated by savage jealousy. It was, however, insufferable that he should display it in this fashion.

"I must point out that I organized the expedition," she said. "Everybody here is my guest."

"Did you invite Gladwyne and Batley?"

"I did not," Millicent was compelled to own. "For all that, they are now in the same position as the rest. I must ask you to remember it."

Lisle had some trouble in controlling himself, but he nodded. "Well," he responded, "I'll have to alter several of our arrangements and I'll go along and talk it over with the packers. I've got the canoes required, and we'll take the trail at seven to-morrow."

He strode away toward the packers' fire, quite aware that he had not behaved in a very seemly way, but still consumed with indignation against Gladwyne. When he had disappeared, Clarence looked up.

"I'm sorry if we have given you unnecessary trou-

ble; but does your guide often adopt that rather hectoring tone?"

His languid contempt roused Crestwick.

"Lisle's responsible for the safety of all of us," the lad broke out, "and you haven't shown much regard for it in making your loads as light as you could!"

Millicent raised her hand.

"We'll talk about something else for a few minutes and then break up. It's an early start to-morrow."

They dispersed shortly afterward, but Batley sought Lisle before retiring to rest.

"I regret that we have added to your anxiety," he began. "Of course, transport is a serious difficulty — I've had some little experience of this kind of thing."

"In the field?" Lisle asked bluntly. "I've had a suspicion of it. Then why didn't you remember?" He saw Batley's smile, for they were standing by the packers' fire. "Oh," he added, "you needn't trouble to shield Gladwyne. I formed my opinion of him some time ago — he's a mighty poor specimen."

"I'm inclined to agree with you," replied Batley dryly.

They set off early the next morning, and after his forced march, Gladwyne found the load given him sufficiently heavy. He was badly jaded, aching all over, and disturbed in mind, when they camped near the summit of the divide late in the afternoon without his having been able to secure a word with Millicent alone. He felt that he must gain her consent to a formal engagement before Lisle let fall any hint of his suspicions, which he did not believe had been done

so far. Afterward, knowing Millicent, he thought she would staunchly refuse to listen to anything to his discredit, and he could, if it were needful, ascribe Lisle's attack to jealousy. He must, however, also contrive to push on ahead of the party, on some excuse, and obliterate any remaining trace of the former expedition's provision caches; then he would be safe.

Millicent had strolled away from the others and was standing among the rocks when he overtook her. The signs of fatigue and tension in his face softened her toward him. Still, it was only compassion; she felt no thrill, but rather an involuntary shrinking and a sense of alarm. She was to be called upon to fulfil a duty to which she had somehow pledged herself.

"Millicent," he began, "things can't go on as they have been doing — pleasant as it was. I have waited patiently, but you can't expect too much. Now I have come a long way to claim my reward. I want the right to look after you, and to tell the others so."

His abruptness and hoarseness were expressive, but she felt that there was something lacking and she answered with a flippancy she seldom indulged in.

"You thought it needful to bring your privy counselor with you?"

"No; he came without even asking my permission."

"Well," she said, sitting down with forced calmness, "it doesn't matter; but are you quite sure now that you really want me?"

There was no doubt that he was desperately anxious for her formal word; there was a feverish eagerness in his eyes. It puzzled her, but it left her unmoved and cold.

"Want you!" he cried. "Can you ask? Haven't I constantly shown my devotion?"

"For the last few months — I mean after Lisle went back to Canada," she replied with gathering color. "Before then, for a time, I think one could reasonably have doubted it."

He looked confused; that Bella had attracted him had been obvious, and there was no way of getting over the fact gracefully.

"I'm afraid I have my weaknesses — want of balance, impulsiveness, and a capacity for being easily piqued," he confessed. "Well, though perhaps I deserved it, you were cold and aloof enough to madden a more patient man, and I suppose I slackly yielded to wounded vanity. All the time, you were the one I had chosen; the only woman who had ever really stirred or could influence me. Nearly as long as I can remember I have loved and respected you. Occasionally you unbent enough to show me that you recognized it."

There was some truth in this, and seeing the change in her expression, he went on:

"You can't cast me off and fling me back upon myself — I couldn't face that. During those last few months in England, you helped me forward far more than you suspected — showed me my duties, enabled me to carry them out. I can't go on alone; I'm your responsibility; having taken it up, you can't deny it now."

Millicent smiled faintly.

"No," she admitted; "I suppose that would be hardly fair."

He would have thrown his arm about her, but she

laid a hand on his shoulder and with gentle firmness held him back.

"No," she said, with a deep color in her face; "not yet. We have been associated as cousins; I must get used to the new position."

He had wit enough to yield, but he kissed her hands exultantly.

"It's a pledge! I may tell the others?"

"Yes," she consented quietly, "I think you may."

For a while he sat at her feet, with her hand on his shoulder, talking about the future, and she was sensible of a certain calm satisfaction which had in it more than a trace of resignation. She had not shirked her duty, she was safe from temptation, and she had after all a sincere, half-pitying tenderness for the man. Her liking for him would, she thought, grow stronger, and the passion which Lisle had once or twice half awakened in her was a thing to be subdued and dreaded. Though Gladwyne saw that she was but lightly moved, he was content, and some time had passed when they went slowly back together to the camp.

Miss Hume was the first to notice them and when Millicent smiled she went hastily forward and kissed her. Then Bella joined them and Batley offered his good wishes in fitting terms. When Lisle and Nasmyth came up, a word from Bella was sufficient for them. For a moment the girl was startled by what she read in the Canadian's face. It was, however, invisible to Millicent. Turning suddenly round without speaking he strode away, followed by Nasmyth. Stopping when he was hidden from the camp among the rocks Lisle turned savagely to his companion.

"You heard what Bella said!"

"I did!" replied Nasmyth. "The hound! It must be stopped!"

"Yes," asserted Lisle, more coolly, "that's a sure thing. Still, there are difficulties — she may not believe my story now. I almost think I'll wait until we reach the two caches; then with something to back my statements, I might force the truth from him."

"In that case, you had better watch him," warned Nasmyth, looking deeply disturbed. "He may try to reach them first."

The next moment Crestwick joined them.

"What's to be done, Vernon?" he exclaimed. "Miss Gladwyne's engagement's formally announced — it can't go on!"

"Why?" Lisle's voice was stern. "What has it to do with you?"

"Well," explained Crestwick, hesitating, "the man's not to be trusted, he's dangerous. He simply can't be allowed to make this match!" He paused and spread out his hands. "I'm horribly troubled about it — I'd better tell you that I know —"

"You know nothing that need be mentioned," Lisle interrupted him. "That's positive; you have to remember it. As to the rest, you'll leave the matter entirely in my hands."

"Oh, well," agreed Crestwick, "if you order it. That relieves me of my responsibility. I'm uncommonly glad to get rid of it."

Lisle abruptly strode away, and Crestwick saw that Nasmyth was regarding him curiously.

"Lisle was quite right," Nasmyth said. "He only forestalled me in instructions I meant to give you."

"Then you understand what I was referring to?" exclaimed Crestwick.

"I've a good idea," Nasmyth answered dryly. "In my opinion, so has Lisle."

"But you were on the far side of the hedge on the morning we tried the horse, and Lisle was down. He wasn't conscious when I broke through the thorns."

"Quite correct; but it's most unlikely he lost consciousness from the fall, and he was lying with his face turned toward the jump — it wasn't until the chestnut came down on his shoulder that he was badly hurt. The doctor agreed with me on that point."

"That might have struck me," Crestwick rejoined. "But you owned that you had an idea of what happened at the jump. How did you get it? Did Lisle tell you?"

Nasmyth smiled grimly.

"I'm firmly convinced that he'll never mention what he saw or suspects to anybody, unless it's to Gladwyne. As to the rest, the hedge wasn't thick enough to prevent my seeing through it."

"He's an unusual man," declared Crestwick in an admiring tone. "I haven't met his equal. But I'll keep my eye on Gladwyne — there's risk enough at some of the rapids — the hound shan't have another chance if I can help it."

They turned and went back to camp, but on reaching it they sat down among the packers, avoiding Gladwyne and Millicent.

CHAPTER XXIX

A BOLD SCHEME

THE sense of security which Millicent experienced on announcing her engagement was not permanent and in a few days the doubts that had troubled her crept back into her mind. She had never entertained any marked illusions about Clarence and although, now that she was irrevocably pledged to him, she endeavored to fix her thoughts on his most likable qualities, even these appeared in a less favorable light than they had formerly done. The growth of the warmer attachment she had expected to feel was strangely slow, and though it was early to indulge in regrets her heart sometimes grew heavy as she looked forward to the future. Clarence was considerate, attentive and deferential in a polished way, but he lacked something one looked for in a lover. Besides, she was anxious about him; he looked worn, his manner suggested that he was bearing a strain, but this was in his favor, for it roused her compassion. She fancied that the cause of it was financial, and this in a sense was encouraging, because this was a trouble from which she could purchase him immunity.

In the meanwhile she was stirred by mournful memories as she followed the last stages of her brother's journey and visited the lonely spot where

he had met his end. Somehow the thought of him encouraged her — George had quietly done his duty, regardless of the cost, and even if her burden proved heavy, which it was premature to admit, she must bear it cheerfully.

At length they stopped one evening at a portage, and Lisle examined the stores.

"The food's getting short," he announced. "One or two of you had better take out your rifles the first thing to-morrow, while the rest go fishing. I'll tackle the portage with two packers."

He began his work at sunrise the next morning and it was toward evening when Crestwick came back exultant with a blacktail buck. Nasmyth was fishing near the camp and Lisle was busy with a canoe near by.

"Where are the rest? How have they got on?" Lisle asked.

"I think Batley went back to the last reach with Carew's rod," Crestwick answered. "I met Gladwyne and one of the packers on the low range back yonder; they'd only got a blue grouse."

"I could have done with the man here," said Lisle. "Which way were they heading?"

"Back up-river, the way we came."

Lisle made no comment, but Crestwick thought he found the information reassuring, and thrusting out the canoe he was swept away down the easiest part of the rapid, while Crestwick assisted Nasmyth to land a trout. Lisle had returned to the camp when the packer who had accompanied Clarence came in alone, bringing a couple of grouse.

"What's become of Mr. Gladwyne?" Lisle asked him.

"Hasn't he got back?" replied the other, glancing about. "I lost him on the far slope of the bluff about noon, but as he could see the river most anywhere from the top I went right on. There was a deer trail I was trying to follow."

Lisle said nothing more to the packer but walked rapidly toward where the cook was getting supper ready. Nasmyth followed him.

"Did you give Mr. Gladwyne any lunch to carry with him when he left camp?" Lisle asked the man.

"I was busy when he came along and I told him to look around for himself. I think he took some canned stuff and there was quite a big loaf missing."

"Bring the box you keep the canned goods in!"

The cook produced it.

"There's two meat cans gone, anyway," he remarked. "Looks as if Mr. Gladwyne figured on getting mighty hungry."

Lisle nodded.

"Put me up enough bread and fish for two of us for two days."

He moved away with Nasmyth, and they had left the fire behind when he spoke, his voice hoarse with anger.

"Gladwyne's gone to the cache! He's got half a day's clear start of us and he knows the country. It's pretty open and he'll make quite a good pace on a straight trail, while the river bends. Get the stuff I asked for while I give the others a few instructions."

"You mean to start after him at once?"

"As soon as you're ready," Lisle said shortly.

He turned back toward where the others were sitting waiting for supper.

"As Gladwyne hasn't turned up, Nasmyth and I are going to look for him," he announced. "There's nothing to be alarmed about, but it's quite likely we may not be back in the morning. If we don't turn up by noon, you had better start down-river and we'll pick you up farther on. I don't want to waste another day."

"Do you think he has got lost altogether?" Millicent asked anxiously.

"No," answered Lisle, in a reassuring manner. "Still, some of these ridges are bad to climb and quite a lot of things may happen to delay him."

He called to a packer and gave him definite orders to take the party down-river and wait at a spot agreed upon; and a few minutes later he and Nasmyth left the camp.

Shortly afterward Batley came in.

"Where are the others?" he asked.

They told him and he looked thoughtful.

"So Lisle started at once! Which way did he and Nasmyth go?"

"Up the ridge behind us, but they turned downstream when they reached the top," Carew replied.

Batley scented a mystery.

"Well," he said, "I think I'll go after them; I might be useful. Of course, you'll start to-morrow as Lisle told you, and if I'm not back by then, I'll follow the river to the rendezvous he mentioned."

He disappeared, as did Crestwick, who came in for supper later on, and as the packers had pitched their tent lower down, there was now only Carew left with the women in camp. They were all a little uneasy as dusk grew near; the haste with which the men had set

out one after another struck them as ominous. Bella's mind was unusually active, for she had promptly decided that there was something behind all this, and when at last Millicent strolled away from the others she followed her to the edge of the water. A ridge of rock cut them off from view of the camp and though she fancied that Millicent was not pleased to see her, Bella sat down upon a stone.

"In a way, the anxiety that Lisle and the rest have shown to find Clarence is flattering," she began, expressing part of her thoughts. "I wonder if they'd all have gone off in such a hurry if Jim had got lost."

"Your brother knows the bush," returned Millicent, hiding her fears.

Bella did not respond to this. She had decided that Millicent must not be allowed to marry Gladwyne, but she could not bring herself to denounce the man. If that must be done, somebody else would have to undertake the task. At the same time, she felt it incumbent on her to give the girl some warning, or at least to find out how far her confidence in her lover went, in order to determine how advice could best be offered.

"I wonder if you feel quite sure you will be happy with Clarence?" she ventured.

"You have provoked the retort — were you convinced that you would be happy with Arthur Carew, when you made up your mind to marry him so suddenly?"

Bella's smile expressed forbearance. It was getting dark, but she could see the hot flush in her companion's cheeks and the sparkle in her eyes. Neither was encouraging, but Bella was not easily daunted, and she felt that her persistence was really meritorious,

considering that until lately Millicent had never been cordial to her.

"Perhaps I'd better answer," she said sweetly. "I was sure of Arthur, and that means a good deal more than that I knew he was in love with me — I don't suppose you heard that he'd proposed to me once before?"

"Why didn't you take him then?" Millicent asked coldly. "Remember you have justified my being personal."

Bella grew rather hot — when Carew had made his first offer she had been in eager pursuit of Gladwyne — but she sternly suppressed a desire to retaliate.

"I don't think we need go into that," she replied. "As I said, I was sure of Arthur — I knew his character, knew he was better than I am, that he could be depended on. He's the kind of man one is safe with; I felt that the more I saw of him, the more I could trust him. Perhaps the feeling's a safer guide than passion — it stands longer wear — and now I'm getting to like him better every day."

Her voice dropped to a tender note and Millicent felt a little astonished, and ashamed of her harshness. This was a new Bella, one in whose existence she could hardly have believed.

"I haven't quite finished, though I don't often talk like this," Bella went on. "I feel that without the confidence I've tried to describe marriage must be a terrible risk — one might find such ugly qualities in the man; even defects you could forgive beforehand would become so much worse when you had to suffer because of them. Of course, one can't expect perfection, but there ought to be something — honor, a good

heart, a generous mind — that one can rely on as a sure foundation. When you have that, you can build, and even then the building may be difficult." She paused before she concluded: "My dear, I'm happier than I deserve to be; I have chosen wisely."

Nothing more was said for a few minutes, but Bella, studying her companion's face, was more or less content. Millicent's faith in Clarence was weak, she was forcing herself to believe in him; it might be possible to make her see her lover in his true character, though Bella had not yet determined on the exact course she would adopt. Then Carew called from the camp and she went back, while Millicent sat still with grave doubts in her heart. Bella's faith in her husband was warranted, and Millicent was enough of an optimist to believe that such men were not uncommon — there was Lisle, for example, and Nasmyth. With them one would undoubtedly have something to build a happy and profitable life upon — but what could be done with one in whom there was no foundation, only the shifting sands of impulses, or, perhaps, unsounded depths of weakness into which the painfully-raised edifice might crumble? She stove to convince herself that she was becoming wickedly hypercritical, thinking treasonably of her lover, particularly in contrasting him with her guide. There must be no more of that, and she rose and walked back to her tent with a resolution that cost her an effort.

In the meanwhile Lisle and Nasmyth were pushing on as fast as possible along the stony summit of the ridge. There was moonlight, which made it a little easier, but they stumbled every now and then. Here and there they were forced to scramble down the sides

of a gully and on reaching the bottom to plunge into water, and once they had to scramble some distance shut in by the rocks before they could find a means of ascending. Still, they were hard and inured to fatigue, and they never slackened the pace. When striding along a stretch of smoother ground Nasmyth gathered breath to speak.

"We were easily taken in," he declared; "though the thing was cunningly planned. Gladwyne took the packer with him and headed back at first, to divert suspicion. It would be easy enough to lose the man and turn down-stream again; and that he intended something of the kind is proved by his taking so much food with him. No doubt, he'd rather have avoided that, in case it looked suspicious, but he's had one hungry march over the same ground, and I dare say it was quite enough. Besides, he could defy us once he'd emptied and obliterated the caches."

"You understand the way your people's minds work better than I do," Lisle returned dryly.

"That's natural, isn't it? The idea that I'm most impressed with just now is that Millicent might believe it her duty to stick to Clarence more closely because of a tale that was merely damaging. She would never allow herself or anybody else to credit it, unless she had absolutely convincing proof."

"Yes," agreed Lisle; "I guess you're right. That's precisely why we have got to get there first."

A thicket of thorny vines and canes barred his way, but he went straight at the midst of it and struggled through, savagely smashing and rending down the brush. The clothes he had borrowed from Carew looked considerably the worse for wear when he came

out; and then he recklessly leaped across a dark cleft the bottom of which he could not see. Presently they left the ridge and headed away from the river, which flowed round a wide curve, and toward dawn they were brought up by a ravine. The roar of water rose hoarsely from its depths. The moon was getting low and the silvery light did not reach far down the opposite side, but they could see a sheer, smooth wall of rock, and the width of the chasm rendered any attempt to jump it out of the question.

"No way of getting across here," decided Lisle. "At the same time, it looks as if Gladwyne must be held up on the same side that we are. We'll follow the cañon; down-stream, I think."

The moonlight was getting dimmer, but, at some risk of falling into the rift, they pushed on along the brink, looking down as they went. They could see no means of descending, but at length, when rocks and trees were getting blacker and a little more distinct in the chilly dawn, they made out a fallen trunk with broken white branches lying upon a tall mass of rock below.

"I've an idea that the top of that tree reached across to this side when it first came down," Lisle said. "Have you got a match?"

Nasmyth had brought a few carefully-treasured wax matches with him, and he lighted one. It was very still, except for the roar of the hidden torrent, and the pale flame burned steadily in the motionless cold air. It showed a couple of hollows, where something had rested, close to the edge of the rift, and one or two fresh scratches on a strip of rock. Lisle stooped down beside them.

"Hold the thing lower!" he exclaimed sharply. "It's as I suspected — this is where Gladwyne got across; though he has better nerves than I thought he had. The broken end of a branch or two rested right here, and he was smart enough to heave the butt off the other bank, after he'd crawled over. Looks to me as if it had broken off yonder stump. Guess there'll be light enough to look for a way across in half an hour."

Sitting down he filled his pipe, and shortly afterward he raised one hand as if listening. For a while, Nasmyth could hear nothing except the roar of water; there was not a sound that he could catch in the thin straggling bush behind them where few trails of mist were stretched athwart the trees. Then he started as a faint crackling and snapping began in the distance.

"Can it be a bear?" he asked.

"No; it's a man!"

Nasmyth was somewhat astonished. They had not seen a human being except those of their party for a long while, and it seemed strange that they should come across one now in the early dawn in those remote wilds.

"He's wearing boots," he said diffidently, as the crackling drew nearer.

"Yes," Lisle responded; "he's making a good deal more noise than a bushman would."

The sound steadily approached them. Nasmyth found something mysterious and rather eerie in it, and he was on the whole relieved when a dark figure materialized among the trees near by. He could barely see it, but Lisle called out sharply:

"What has brought you on our trail, Batley?"

The man came toward them with a breathless laugh and sat down.

"It isn't your trail but Gladwyne's I'm interested in, and I can't say that I've succeeded in following that. I merely pushed on, until I struck this cañon and as I couldn't get across, I followed it up."

"You're not easily scared," Lisle commented. "You might have got lost. Guess you had some motive that made you take the risk."

"I felt pretty safe. You see, I knew I could strike the river, if necessary. At the same time you were right about the motive — in fact, there's no use in trying to hide it. I may as well confess that I'd sooner keep Gladwyne in sight."

"Out of regard for his welfare?" Nasmyth asked.

Batley laughed.

"Not altogether. The fact is, he's carrying a good deal of my money."

"One should have imagined that you'd have had him well insured."

"That's quite correct. If he came to grief in England, I shouldn't anticipate any trouble, but it would be different out here and, everything considered, I'd rather avoid complications with the insurance companies. Now that I've been candid, do you feel inclined to reciprocate?"

"Not in the least," Lisle replied shortly. "I'm not sure I even sympathize. But since you've turned up you'll have to stick to us; I don't want to waste time in leading another search party. As soon as there's a little more light, we'll try to get across the cañon."

"Thanks for the permission," smiled Batley, lighting a cigar.

CHAPTER XXX

THE END OF THE PURSUIT

BY degrees the light got clearer, the scattered black cedars grew into definite form, and a strip of foaming water showed in the depths of the chasm. Lisle walked some distance along the edge, searching for an easier place to cross, but the rocks were smooth and almost perpendicular except where they overhung the torrent. He went back to where the others were sitting and found that they had been joined by Crestwick, who briefly explained that having set out on their trail he had been stopped by the cañon and had followed it up until it led him to them.

"It looks worse farther along; we'll have to try it here," Lisle announced. "Can you get down, Nasmyth?"

Nasmyth glanced into the rift. It was, he judged, nearly sixty feet in depth, but part of the bank on which he stood had slipped down into the stream, leaving an uneven surface by means of which an agile man might descend. A tall slab of rock, evidently part of the fallen mass, rose in a pinnacle from the water, and on top of it rested the branches of the tree that Gladwyne had used as a bridge and had afterward dislodged. The rock behind it on the opposite bank was absolutely smooth, but the thicker end of the log,

which had fallen against the face, reached to within about nine feet of the summit.

"Yes," he said, answering Lisle's question; "but I'm very doubtful whether I can get up the other side. The last bit looks particularly awkward; there's an outward bulge just beneath the top."

"We might manage it by giving the leader a lift, if we got so far," Batley suggested, pointing to the sharp slab. "That pike should help us; I think it would go."

"You think it would go?" queried Nasmyth meaningly. "Aren't you mixing idioms? Pike's what we'd say round Wasdale, and your other expression's not uncommon in Switzerland."

Batley laughed.

"I'll own that I've done some rock work in both districts, though I was thinner then. But I've an idea that time's precious to our leader."

He lowered himself over the edge and finding foothold, went down cautiously by crack and fissure, while the others followed with some trouble. Alighting waist-deep in a frothing rush of water, he was driven for a few yards down-stream, and it was only by seeking the support of the rock that he slowly made head against the torrent. Lisle joined him when he reached the foot of the pinnacle, where they stopped to gather breath with a thin shower of spray whirling about them. The light was still dim down in the bottom of the chasm, and the mass of rock ran up above them, shadowy, black and almost smooth.

Wasting no time in examination, Lisle flung himself upon it, seeking for a grip with elbows and knees. He had ascended a yard or two when he lost hold and

coming down with a run fell with a splash into the stream.

"I didn't think you'd manage it that way," Batley remarked. "The edge appears a little more promising."

He went up, with Lisle following, finding hold for knees and fingers, while Nasmyth and Crestwick, panting heavily, encouraged each other below. On reaching the top of the pinnacle, Batley lay upon it and gave Lisle his hand; and when he had drawn him up he pointed to the tree.

"I'll go first, for reasons that will become apparent later," he explained. "Hold on to the log; it doesn't seem firmly fixed."

The tree was small and when Lisle shook it the butt moved against the face of the rock, which was separated by a broad gap from the top of the fallen mass. Batley was heavy, but he ascended cautiously, while Lisle leaned upon the log to steady it. Then, calling Nasmyth to take his place, Lisle went up. When he was near the top, it looked as if their progress must abruptly cease. The butt was narrow and the summit of the rock above it projected somewhat. There was not the smallest knob or crevice one could grasp, and below them in the shadowy rift the torrent boiled furiously among massy stones. It was not a place to slip in.

Batley, however, rose very carefully, with his feet upon the shattered butt and his hands pressed against the rock, until he stood almost upright.

"You'll have to climb up over me until you can get your fingers on the top," he said. "Take time when you get up and feel for a good hold."

Reaching his shoulders, Lisle stood on them while Nasmyth and Crestwick on the pinnacle beneath looked up at a somewhat impressive spectacle. Lisle's head and shoulders were now above the edge, but he was forced to bend backward and outward by the projecting bulge which pressed against his breast, and his cautious movements suggested that he could find no hold. It appeared impossible for him to descend, unless he did so accidentally, and in that event nothing could save him from a fall to the bottom of the ravine. For a while, they watched his tense figure moving futilely; and then Batley, standing most precariously poised, bent his arm and seized one of Lisle's feet. He spoke in a breathless gasp as he thrust it upward; Lisle's legs swung free and he disappeared beyond the edge. The two below were conscious of a vast relief. It was tempered, however, by the knowledge that they must shortly emulate their companion's exploit.

"Take off your pack!" Batley called to Lisle. "Split the bag, if it's necessary, and lower the end! But be quick! This isn't a comfortable position."

The pack in which the small bush rancher conveys his provisions from the nearest store as a rule consists of a cotton flour bag with a pair of suspenders fastened to its corners, and Nasmyth had provided the party with a few receptacles of similar pattern but more strongly made before entering the wilds. The straps, when Lisle let them down, reached several feet from the top, and Batley bade Nasmyth and Crestwick ascend. They managed it with assistance from Lisle, who seized them from above. Then Batley called up to them.

"I'm going to test the tackle. Give me a hand up as soon as I'm over the bulge!"

It was difficult to hear him, as he was still beneath the projecting edge, and they watched the straining straps with keen anxiety until a hand that felt for a hold upon the rock appeared. Lisle seized it, with Nasmyth ready to assist, and Batley came up, gasping, with the perspiration streaming from his face.

"I'd have managed it easily at one time," he said. "This is what comes of civilization and soft living."

"You brought us across; we owe you a good deal for it," declared Lisle.

Batley smiled at him as they set off again.

"In this case, I won't be an exacting creditor. In fact, it's rather curious how we've hit it off, considering that you wouldn't hear of a compromise and our interests are opposed."

"I don't know what your interests are," Lisle returned dryly.

"Then, in one way, I'm ahead of you. I know your wishes, and Nasmyth's — you don't want Clarence to marry Miss Gladwyne. It's your motive I'm not sure about. Do you want the girl yourself?"

They were some distance in front of the others, who were too far behind to hear them. Lisle looked at his companion steadily. The man was engaged in a business that was regarded with general disfavor, but there was something he liked about him and he did not resent his bluntness.

"Well," he answered, "it isn't for the reason you've given that I mean to stop the match."

"Can you do so?"

"I'm going to try."

Batley smiled reflectively.

"And the present journey is somehow connected with the attempt? Now I believe I might have left you held up on the wrong side of the cañon; the idea was in my mind and you can give me credit for not yielding to it. I suppose there would be no use in my asking you for a hint as to the relation between my rather tricky companion's expedition and his cousin's death?"

"None in the least," said Lisle decidedly.

Batley made a gesture of acquiescence.

"Oh, well! We must try to be friends as long as possible."

Nothing more was said about the matter, and they spent the day forcing a passage through scrub timber, up precipitous hillsides, and across long stony ridges.

There was no sign of Gladwyne's trail, but that did not trouble Lisle, for he knew where the man was heading for. On the second day Batley showed signs of distress, and Nasmyth and Crestwick were walking very wearily, but Lisle held on at a merciless pace. It was essential that he should reach the cache before Gladwyne could interfere with it. Toward evening, Nasmyth made an effort and caught up with Lisle.

"How would Clarence get across to the second cache on the other side of the water?" he asked. "It's a point I've been considering; I suppose it's occurred to you."

"I don't know," Lisle confessed. "The Indians near the divide said there was another party with canoes somewhere lower down; but, as the packer who was with me didn't talk to them, so far as I noticed, I don't see how Gladwyne could have heard of it; but

that's as far as I can go. If he destroyed the first cache, it would help to clear him, unless you can vouch for the correctness of the list I made; but he may have some further plan in his mind." He paused and raised his hand. "Listen! Isn't that the river? We can't be far from the cache."

The day, like the two or three preceding it, had been hot and bright, and now that evening was drawing on, the still air was heavy with the smell of the cedars in a neighboring hollow. A high ridge stood out black against a vivid green glow, and from beyond it there rose a faint, hoarse murmur. Nasmyth welcomed it gladly as announcing the end of the march.

"The rest of the party can hardly be down until to-morrow; there's a couple of portages," he said. "It looks as if we'll have to go without our supper."

"I don't want to see them before morning," Lisle returned grimly.

They pushed on, the light growing dimmer as they went, until at length the moon rose from behind the ridge; and when they had skirted the ridge they saw the river glimmer beneath them in a flood of silvery radiance. It filled the gorge with its deep murmur, for the hot sunshine for three days had melted the snow, which had poured down to swell the flood by every gully. Not far below the neck the broken surface was flecked with white where the river swept angrily over a sharper slope of its bed, and a black boulder or two stood out in the midst of the rushing foam. Up-stream of this there was a strip of shingle which Nasmyth recognized as the one where the cache

had been made; he supposed that Lisle had struck the spot by heading for the narrow rift of the neck, which was conspicuous for some distance from both sides.

From end to end the sweep of pebbles was clearly distinct; but there was no dark figure moving about it, and Nasmyth wondered if they had come too late. They had marched fast, as his aching muscles testified, but they had been delayed at the cañon and Gladwyne had had a long start. If he had arrived and had visited the cache, their efforts might prove to have been thrown away. There must be no shadow of doubt when Lisle told his startling story.

They descended with caution, moving through shadow, for the ridge above them cut off the moonlight, though it was far from dark, and they were near the bottom when Crestwick dislodged a bank of stones which went rattling and crashing down to the beach. A moment later a black form sprang out from among the rocks below and ran hurriedly along the shingle. This surprised Nasmyth because he could not doubt that the man was Gladwyne and he failed to understand his object in making what would probably be a futile attempt to avoid them. Lisle was some distance in front, and his voice rang out sharply:

"Head him off from the canoe!"

Nasmyth broke into a stumbling run — it was now obvious that Gladwyne meant to cross the river, and perhaps destroy the second cache.

Gladwyne had reached the canoe when Lisle gained the beach, and Nasmyth, descending in reckless haste, saw him hurriedly turn it over and raise the forward end of it. Lisle was running his hardest, almost as

if he were fresh, up the long strip of shingle; but it was evident that he would be too late, and they would have no means of following Gladwyne after the canoe was launched. There was a sharp rattle of stones as he hauled it down; Lisle was still some way behind; Gladwyne sprang on board and thrust the light craft off, and a few strokes of the paddle drove her well out into the stream.

Lisle stopped, standing in the moonlight, and his comrade could see his hands tightly clenched at his side; then he suddenly tore off his jacket and flung it behind him. Noticing this, Nasmyth attempted to increase his pace. The river was running fast, swollen with melted snow, and Lisle must be badly worn out. If he had to be restrained by force, he should not attempt to swim across.

Then, to Nasmyth's astonishment, Gladwyne leaned over the stern of the craft and began to paddle desperately with one hand. This proceeding caused Lisle to stop again, close at the water's edge.

"Come back!" he shouted.

Nasmyth ran up and Lisle turned.

"He's dropped or broken his paddle — cracked it when he shoved her out. There are two or three ugly rocks in the rapid."

They ran along the bank together, keeping pace with the craft which was sliding away fast with the stream. Nasmyth could feel his heart thumping as he wondered what Clarence would do. Though he could not cross the river, it was possible that he might propel the light canoe back to the shingle with his hand before he reached the rapid. As he could not guide her in the strong rush of water, there would be danger

in attempting to descend it. He made no response, however, to their warning shouts.

Batley and Crestwick overtook the others shortly before the canoe swept into the faster stream at the head of the rapid and they watched her eagerly. There was a narrow pass between several boulders close ahead, which was the chief danger, and the current seemed to be carrying the craft down on one of them. In a few moments she struck and jambed, broadside on, across the mass of stone. White foam boiled about her; they saw Gladwyne rise and clutch the rock, but whether to thrust her off or to climb out did not appear. He suddenly sank down and, so far as they could make out, the canoe rolled over.

The next moment Lisle plunged into the river. Nasmyth ran to the water's edge, but seeing that he was too late, he sat down limply. Lisle was a good swimmer, but it did not seem possible that any man could reach Clarence before he was washed out at the tail of the rapid. It became evident, however, that somebody else meant to try, for Batley, running hard down the beach, plunged in.

"It's awful!" gasped Jim Crestwick behind Nasmyth. "It's not the risk of drowning; they'll be smashed to bits! Anyway, we'd better make for the slack at the tail."

Nasmyth got up. He could see nothing of Gladwyne or either of the others; there were only black rocks, rushing water and outbreaks of foam, and he had a sickening idea that long before they reached the quieter pool the need for any services he could render would be past. Fortunately, the beach was fairly smooth, and after a desperate run they reached a

tongue of rock beneath which the eddy swung. Farther on, in the shadow, Batley stood in the water, calling to them and apparently clinging hard to a half-seen object in the stream.

Nasmyth leaped in knee-deep, with Crestwick behind him, and gripping the loosely-hanging arm of the body Batley was supporting, he asked hoarsely:

"Who is it?"

"Lisle!" was the breathless answer. "Help me to get him out!"

They dragged him up the beach and let him sink down. He lay upon the shingle, silent and inert.

"Make a fire, Jim!" commanded Batley. "Lift his shoulder a bit, Nasmyth! Turn him partly over!"

He hurriedly examined Lisle and then looked up.

"It's not a case of drowning; and his limbs look sound. Must have got the breath knocked out of him against a boulder." He pointed to a broad red gash on Lisle's forehead as Nasmyth eased him down again. "That explains his unconsciousness."

"Where's Gladwyne?" Nasmyth asked.

Batley made an expressive gesture.

"Beyond our help, anyway; somewhere down-river." He appeared to brace himself with an effort. "I'm pretty nearly finished, but there's a good deal to be done. We'll strip Lisle, and you and Crestwick can share your dry things with him. Then one of you had better gather cedar twigs for him to lie on."

CHAPTER XXXI

LISLE GOES TO ENGLAND

LISLE had with some difficulty been dressed in dry clothes, and he lay with his eyes shut on a couch of cedar sprays beside a fire, when Batley rose and turned to Nasmyth.

"I don't think we need be anxious," he said. "The warmth is coming back to him and he's breathing regularly. The knock on the head must have been a bad one, and it's very likely that he got another thump or two washing down the rapid, and the water was icy cold; but he'll feel better after a few hours' sleep."

Nasmyth was inclined to agree with this prediction and he stood up wearily.

"Then you won't want me for a little while," he replied, walking away from the fire.

Having given most of his clothes to Lisle, he was very lightly clad and the night was cold. He shivered as he plodded over the shingle, aching in every limb, but he looked about eagerly and after a while he found the cache. It was uncovered, but there were signs that Gladwyne had only begun his task when he had been surprised by the arrival of the party which had followed him.

Nasmyth did not pause to think what Lisle's wishes might be, or whether he would resent his action. So

far, he had kept his promise; but, with physical weariness reacting on his mental faculties, he was only conscious of a hazy idea that Gladwyne's death had released him from his pledge. The traitor had expiated his offense; the tragic story must never be raked up again.

Stooping over the receptacle, he dragged out the different articles in it, and avoiding a direct glance at them or any attempt to enumerate them, he gathered them up and striding over the shingle hurled them as far as possible into the river. It cost him several journeys, but his heart grew lighter with every splash. When at last the work was finished and he had refilled the hole and scattered the stones that had covered it, he sat down with a great sense of relief. A burden which had long weighed upon his mind was gone; Mrs. Gladwyne and Millicent were safe at last from the grief and shame that a revelation would have brought them. Exhausted and confused as he was, he could not tell whether he felt any sorrow for Gladwyne's tragic end; the man had passed beyond the reach of human censure, one could only let his memory sink into oblivion.

Growing very cold, he went back to the fire, but he offered no explanation of his absence. Lisle was still asleep or unconscious, but the natural color in his face was reassuring.

"I've heard nothing about your part in the water," Nasmyth said to Batley.

"There's not much to tell. It isn't astonishing that my memory's by no means clear. Anyhow, I wasn't far from Gladwyne, who was swimming well, when he was swept away from me and in among the

lower boulders by the swirl of an eddy. I suppose it didn't quite reach me, but the next moment I was sucked into a rush of broken water and went downstream, below the surface part of the time, because I was surprised when I found I could breathe and look about again. By good luck, I'd got into the smoothest, deepest flow, which swept me straight through. After a little, I saw somebody washing down in a slack and got hold of him. I didn't know whether it was Gladwyne or Lisle; but I held on and a side-swing of the current brought us both ashore. Gladwyne, of course, must have gone under after being badly damaged among the rocks."

"There's only one place where he could have landed and I searched it while you were away," Crestwick said gravely.

"Why did you go in after him?" Nasmyth asked Batley. "You must have seen that you couldn't save him."

"That," Batley answered with a curious smile, "is more than I can clearly tell you; and I might suggest that Lisle's venture is even harder to understand. I don't honestly think I owe Gladwyne anything; but, after all, we passed for friends, and I used to be fond of swimming. Of course, there's a more obvious explanation — I'd lent him a good deal of money and from what I've learned since, I may have some difficulty in enforcing my claim on the estate. It was natural that I should make an effort to recover the debt."

Nasmyth did not think that the man had been most strongly influenced by that desire, but he addressed Crestwick:

"Hadn't you better gather some more branches or driftwood for the fire, Jim?"

Crestwick disappeared, and Nasmyth filled his pipe before he turned to Batley.

"Now," he said, "I don't want to be offensive; but there are two people connected with this affair who must be spared any unnecessary suffering. That's a fact you had better recognize."

"I hardly think you do me justice," returned Batley, looking amused. "It's perfectly plain that there's a mystery behind these recent events; one that has some relation to George Gladwyne's death. Your idea is that an unscrupulous person of my description might find some profit in probing it?"

"You'll never learn the truth. I've seen to that."

"The fact is, I don't mean to try."

Nasmyth was a little astonished at finding himself ready to believe this.

"Then," he asked, "what do you mean to do about your claim on Gladwyne?"

"In the first place, there's the insurance; but I discovered by accident that the company Gladwyne had his policy on was the one that had insured his cousin. Whether they'll be struck by the coincidence and the unusual nature of both accidents and make trouble or not, I can't tell; but if they pay up there'll be an end of the thing. Failing that, I'll have to consider. My demands might be contested by the Gladwyne trustees — the deal was a little irregular in some respects — but I parted with the money and I'm going to make an effort to get it back."

"How much did Clarence owe you?"

Batley told him and Nasmyth looked thoughtful.

"Well," he requested, "if you meet with strong opposition, come to me before you decide on any course, and I'll see what can be arranged. I dare say there'll be some trouble, but I know the trustees — and, as I said, there are people who must be saved all needless pain, at any cost."

"It's promised," agreed Batley. "I'll make things as easy as possible, but that's as far as I can go. I'm not rich enough to be recklessly generous."

Lisle woke soon after this and asked one or two half-intelligible questions, but they gave him no information and he went to sleep again; then Crestwick arrived with more fuel and Nasmyth took the first watch while his companions rested. He was very cold, and now and then he saw Batley, who had discarded most of his wet clothes, wake up for a few moments and shiver. Once or twice he glanced longingly at the garments spread out round the fire, but when he felt them they were still too wet to put on. After a while Crestwick relieved him, and when he awakened dawn was breaking across the black ridges and the rushing river. Batley had left his place, and Crestwick began to stride up and down the beach, presumably to warm himself. To Nasmyth's satisfaction and surprise, Lisle spoke to him.

"You slept pretty sound," he said. "Didn't hear me getting some information about what happened out of Batley."

"Then you know?"

"Yes," was the grim answer. "The thing's finished; there's nothing to be done."

Nasmyth made a sign of agreement.

"How do you feel?" he asked.

"Horribly sore all over, left side particularly. Struck a big boulder, and then drove in among a nest of stones before my senses left me. Tried to get up a while ago, but couldn't manage it. What's as much to the purpose, I'm feeling hungry."

"Unfortunately, there's nothing left for breakfast. One of us had better go up-stream and look out for the canoes."

Lisle nodded.

"That's your duty — I don't envy you. Make them camp a little higher up. It would be better, in several ways, and I'd rather be on my feet again before they come here."

Nasmyth set off, jaded and hungry, and he was feeling very limp when, as he plodded along a high ridge, he saw the canoes sliding down the river. He had hard work to reach the bank and he shrank from the task before him when the first canoe grounded upon the stones. Millicent and Bella were in it, and Millicent gazed at the lonely man with fixed, anxious eyes. He was ragged and looked very weary; his face was worn and haggard.

"Where are the rest?" she asked in a strained voice. "Something has happened — what is it?"

"Three of them are some miles down the river."

"Three!" cried Millicent, in dismay. "Haven't you found Clarence yet?"

Nasmyth hesitated, regarding her compassionately, but she made a sign of protest.

"Go on! Don't keep me in suspense!"

"Clarence," said Nasmyth quietly, "is dead. Lisle is rather badly damaged."

Millicent left the canoe and sat down, very white

in face, upon a neighboring stone. In the meanwhile the other canoes had grounded and her companions gathered about her. She did not speak to them and some time passed before she turned to Nasmyth.

"Tell me all," she begged.

He briefly related what had happened, and there was an impressive silence when he finished. Then Millicent slowly rose.

"And Lisle's badly hurt," she said. "We must go on!"

They relaunched the canoes and Nasmyth had no further speech with her, for as they floated downriver she sat, still and silent, in another canoe. She was conscious chiefly of an unnerving horror and a sense of contrition. Clarence was dead, and she had been coldly hypercritical; hardly treating him as a lover, thinking of his failings. She blamed herself bitterly in a half-dazed fashion, but it was only afterward she realized that she had not been troubled by any very poignant sense of loss.

After a while Nasmyth said they would land, but Millicent roused herself to countermand his instructions and eventually they reached Batley's camp. Lisle had got up during the day and he now walked painfully down to the water's edge to meet her. When she landed he gravely pressed her hand.

"I'm sorry," he said simply. "We did what we could to save him."

"Oh, I know," she responded. "Nobody could doubt that."

Then Nasmyth landed with provisions and while the men ate two Indians strode into the camp and ad-

dressed Lisle angrily. They were curing salmon, they said, and had left a canoe on the shingle, in order to avoid a portage when returning, and they had gone in another craft to set some fish-traps in a lower rapid. To their surprise they had afterward seen their canoe drifting down-stream full of water and badly damaged, and they had set off at once to discover who was responsible.

Lisle offered them some silver currency, and after a little chaffering they departed satisfied.

"Now we know how the canoe came to be lying where Gladwyne found her," he said to Nasmyth.

Then he sought Millicent.

"I think," he told her gently, "we had better go on — to stay here would be painful." He hesitated. "I'll leave Crestwick and an experienced river-Jack packer to investigate. If you would rather, I'll stay with them, though I'm afraid I can't get about much."

"Thank you," she replied in a voice which had a break in it. "You must come with us; you don't look fit to stand."

Running the rapid, they slid away down-river, and once more Millicent sat very still, thinking confused thoughts, until at last they made camp for the night and she crept away to the shelter of her tent. A day or two later Crestwick and the packer overtook them, having discovered nothing; and then the party was animated by a strong desire to escape from the river and reach the trail to the settlements as soon as possible. Further search for Gladwyne was useless; the flood had swept him away and no one would ever know where his bones lay. He had set out on his longest and most mysterious journey, leaving only two

women to mourn him, and of these one, who had tried to love him out of duty, would by and by forget.

On the evening before they left the river, Lisle stood with Millicent looking back up the long reach they had descended. They had reached the taller timber, and on one bank black firs, climbing the hillside, stood out against the fading light with a gauzy mist-curtain drawn across their higher ranks. The flood slid by, glimmering dimly, smooth and green, and from out of the distance came the throbbing clamor of a rapid.

"It's your last look," said Lisle. "We'll be in the bush to-morrow and I expect to hire a wagon, or at least a horse or two, in a few days. Now I'm sorry I ever brought you here. You'll be glad to get away."

"You mustn't blame yourself," she told him. "We have only gratitude for you. You have no part in the painful memories."

She glanced once more up the valley; and then moved back into the shadow of the firs.

"It's all wildly beautiful, but it's so pitiless — I shall never think of it without a shiver."

"You have made plenty of notes and sketches for the book," suggested Lisle, seeing her distress.

"The book? I don't know that I shall ever finish it. I feel cut adrift, as if there were no use in working and I hadn't a purpose left. First George went, and then Clarence — so far, there was always some one to think of — and now I'm all alone."

She broke out into open sobbing and Lisle, feeling very sympathetic and half dismayed, awkwardly tried to soothe her.

"I'm better," she said at last. "It was very fool-

ish, but I couldn't help it. I think we'll go back to the others."

He gave her his arm, for the way was rough, but as they approached the camp she stopped a moment amid the shadow and stillness of the great fir trunks.

"I have done with the river — I think I am afraid of it," she confessed. "Can't we get away early to-morrow?"

Lisle said it should be arranged and she turned to him gratefully.

"One can always rely on you! You're just like George was in many ways. It's curious that whenever I'm in trouble I think of him —"

She seemed on the verge of another breakdown, and she laid her hand in his for a moment before she went from him hurriedly with a low, "Good night!"

Lisle strolled back to the river and lighted his pipe. He had noticed and thought it significant that she spoke more of the brother whom she had lost several years ago than of the lover who had perished recently; but, from whatever cause it sprung, her distress troubled him.

His thoughts were presently interrupted by Nasmyth.

"There's a thing I'd better tell you, Vernon," he said, sitting down near by. "The night you were half drowned I emptied the cache and, without making any note of what was in it, pitched everything into the river."

"So I discovered. At least, when I managed with some trouble to reach the place, I knew it was either you or Gladwyne, and I blamed you."

"Well?"

"I've decided," Lisle said gravely, "that you did quite right. It's the end of that story."

"Then you have abandoned the purpose you had in view?"

"I've been thinking hard, and it seems to me that if Vernon were with me now, the last thing that would please him would be to see the two women suffer; he was a big man in every way. There's another thing — he left no relations to consider."

Nasmyth laid a hand on his shoulder in a very expressive way.

"I felt all along that you'd come to look at it like that!"

"But there's Batley; he has some suspicions."

"I can silence him," promised Nasmyth. "The man has his good points, after all."

"That's so," Lisle agreed. "Still, I'll come straight across to England and tackle him if you fail. If it's a question of money, you can count me in — I've been prospering lately." He rose and knocked out his pipe. "That's the last word on the matter."

They went back to camp, and starting soon after sunrise the next morning they reached a settlement on the railroad after a comparatively easy journey; and that evening Lisle stood with a heavy heart beside the track while the big cars moved away, his eyes fixed on a woman's figure that leaned out from a vestibule platform, waving a hand to him.

After that he went back to his work, with Crestwick; and nearly twelve months had passed when he sent a cable to England and started for that country a day after receiving the answer. Crestwick insisted on going with him.

"You'll no doubt want my support again," he grinned. "There's an office I mean to rob Nasmyth of, if I can."

It was evening when they drove into sight of Millicent's house. Lisle's heart throbbed painfully fast as he got down, but he was not kept waiting. Millicent was standing in her drawing-room, and as he came in she held out her hand to him.

"You answered my message," he said, seizing it. "You must have guessed what I meant when I asked if I might come across."

"Yes," she confessed softly; "I knew and I told you to come."

He still held her a little away from him as he gave a quick glance at the refined and artistic appointments of the room.

"There's a good deal you will have to give up," he told her. "You're not afraid of our new and rugged country? But it has something to offer — and we need such people as you."

"It's going to be a great country before very long," she answered gravely; "and I have no dread of it now. But — I gave my dearest — I think it owes me something in return."

He drew her masterfully into his arms.

"It discharges all its debts. You must teach me how to pay you back in full measure; that's my one big task. You're giving so much freely; but, of course, I'm glad — I don't want duty."

"This isn't duty," she smiled; "it's love!"

THE END